

Tomatoes

1. Preparing The Soil

Two of the most basic needs of tomatoes are 6 to 12 hours of sun daily and rich, well drained loose soil. To improve soil that is either too heavy or too light add compost, peat moss, manure, or ground bark. Spread and work the organic matter 6 inches deep into the soil.

Tomatoes prefer a soil pH of 6.0 to 7.0. Give transplants a good start by working in a pre-planting application of fertilizer, 10-10-10 tomato food.

2. Transplanting

The best time to transplant is on a cloudy day or in the morning or evening hours.

Water your plants just before planting to help the root ball stay intact. Space staked or trellised tomatoes 2 feet apart in rows 3 feet apart. Leave 3 feet between caged tomatoes and 4 feet for plants to grow unsupported.

Set plants deeply in the soil to encourage root formation along the buried stem. Tall, spindly transplants can be planted by a trench method; strip leaves from all but the top five inches of the plant and set plant sideways in a trench dug 3 inches deep.

Add a mulch to help maintain soil moisture, reduce weeds and soil compaction, and keep tomato fruit clean. Use wheat or rye straw, peanut hulls, pine needles, wood chips, or dried grass clippings in a 3-inch thick layer. Never allow mulch to touch the stem of the plant. Keep mulch 3 to 4 inches away from stem.

3. Watering

What tomatoes need is a continuous and uniform supply of water. Excessive water can rot plant roots while too little halts fruit production. Avoid letting soil dry out and then soaking as this can cause blossom drop, fruit cracking, and contributes to blossom-end rot.

Water early in the day and water the ground, not foliage, to prevent disease problems.

4. Fertilizing

Tomatoes need ample fertilizer to produce vigorous vines and abundant fruit. Nutrients should be constantly available to plants. Feeding begins at transplanting time with a starter solution of plant root stimulator. Then start using Miracle-Gro for Tomatoes according to package recommendation all summer.