



HOW TO GROW TOMATOES

There is truly nothing better than a homegrown tomato. Whether you have a greenhouse or just grow bags in a sunny spot in your garden, this how-to guide contains all the tips and tricks to help you grow your own taste of summer.

When and how to sow your seeds

Sow tomatoes indoors from the end of January if you have a heated propagator, otherwise wait until March. We find tomatoes germinate well in shallow furrows in a seed tray, to be pricked out and transplanted into larger pots when at the 3 true leaf stage. Keep seedlings moist, in a sunny spot and protected from frost

Transplanting

If you're growing in a greenhouse or polytunnel transplant them into their final position in May. Wait until after the last frost (usually towards the end of May) to plant them outside in a sheltered, sunny spot.

Plant care

Tomatoes come in two basic shapes, each having different growing needs. Vine tomatoes need staking with a cane or winding on a string and can grow up to 8 feet high. Bush tomatoes grow well outdoors and fruit quickly, only growing to about 4 feet high. Make sure you check the seed packet to see the type of plants you will be growing.

Vine tomatoes naturally try to bush and require weekly pruning of side-shoots to ensure that growth remains upright on one stalk. As plants mature they will also benefit from having their lower leaves removed to let in more light and increase ventilation.

Tomatoes are heavy feeders, meaning they need fertile, well composted soil and will be happy with weekly applications of high-potassium natural fertilisers like comfrey tea.

Tomatoes need to be kept moist by watering evenly and regularly. Use your fingertip to test the soil moisture before watering. During hot periods you may need to water daily. Water at the base of the plant, avoiding wetting the leaves to reduce fungal disease.

Disease and pests

Disease can be caused by fungi, bacteria or viruses like leaf spot or blight. Temperature fluctuations, soil nutrient deficiency and overwatering can also cause problems. Familiarise yourself with common disease signs so you can deal with symptoms quickly and ensure you have a bountiful harvest.

Harvest

Leave tomatoes to ripen naturally in the sun and pick when still firm but with a little give at the base when pressed with your finger.

Seed saving

Allow tomatoes to ripen fully on the vine. Collect a few from each variety you want to save, then slice them in half across the middle and squeeze the pulp and seeds into a labelled jar. Make sure the seeds are fully covered, adding water if needed and leave in a warm place for 2-3 days to start fermenting.

Then add plenty of water to the jar, stirring well. The good seeds should sink to the bottom. Pour off the top layer of seeds and mould and tip the good seeds into a sieve and wash them under running water. Tip the sieve onto a china or glass plate and dry somewhere warm out of direct sunlight. Once dried, rub off the plate and store in a cool dry place.

Our recommended varieties

- Santiam Sunrise is one of the tastiest cherry varieties we've ever grown
- Gardeners Delight is a reliable, highly productive cherry variety
- Paul Robeson is a large, delicious beefsteak variety that's perfect for salad or sandwich connoisseurs