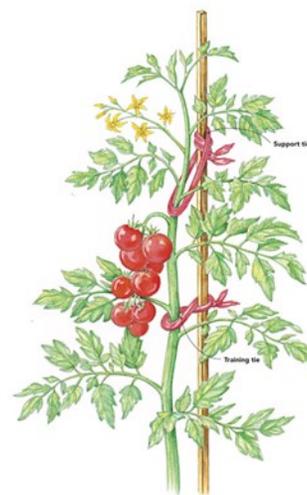


TOMATO SUPPORT

As tomato plants grow, they can become so large and heavy that they fall over and their fruit can become damaged. There's nothing worse than seeing a tomato eaten away by bugs just because it was touching the ground! Supporting the plants will help prevent that. You can use tomato stakes or cages specifically designed for the job, or improvise with a tall sturdy sapling, old broomstick handle, unused ski pole or just about any straight, strong pole.

- Plan to put your stakes or cages in the ground right after you have transplanted the tomatoes.
- If using cages, bend the pointed ends outward before pressing into the ground with the tomato transplant neatly inside. Support further with a stake positioned just inside the topmost rung. This will help keep the cage in place.
- If using stakes, begin by inserting the stake as deep as possible into the soil, about 3-5 inches away from the base of the plant. If possible, orient the stake on the downwind side of the plant so when the wind is blowing hard the plant can lean against the stake. Use a hammer or rubber mallet to drive the stake into the ground.
- As the plant grows, tie a strip of old rag, panty hose or very soft string or yarn tightly around the stake and loosely around the main stem in a figure eight fashion. The stem needs to remain about 1 inch or more from the stake. If you tie the plant stem too tightly to the stake, the tomato will not be able to grow properly.
- For additional stability, you can optionally tie a lightweight pole (bamboo is good material) horizontally, between two of your tomato stakes.



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