

TOMATOES

SQUARE FOOT PLANTING: 4 tomatoes in a 4-foot by 4-foot block

SEED DEPTH: not applicable, transplant only

GERMINATION: not applicable

GROWTH

- In order to develop mature fruit, tomatoes must be transplanted in New England. If you grow your own transplants, start seeds indoors in early April, 6-8 weeks before the estimated last frost date.
- Be sure your transplants are hardened off before you set them out. To harden them off, place transplants outside in the warm sunshine for a few hours at a time, increasing the length of time each day over the course of a week or two, until you are able to leave them outside for a full day. Take transplants indoors overnight if temperatures are especially cold.
- Once your seedling or transplants have matured, plant them outside in late May to early June.
- Tomatoes are especially sun-loving and require consistently moist soil. When they receive inconsistent watering, tomatoes can develop blossom end rot, a calcium deficiency that causes the bottom of the tomato to turn black and decay.
- When watering, focus the water on the soil at the base of the plant; avoid splashing the leaves as this can encourage bacterial growth and leaf burn.
- Tomatoes benefit from staking or caging. This prevents the plant stem from snapping under its own weight.
- To ensure the biggest and best quality fruit, help direct your tomato plant's energies into fewer stems by pinching back suckers as they begin to form in the corner of the plant's main branches.
- Withholding water after mid-August will force the vines to ripen more fruit. Removing all young flower clusters after mid-September will help the remaining fruit ripen as well.

HARVEST

- Allow tomatoes to ripen on the vine for as long as possible. Pick fruit that are bright in color and slightly yielding if squeezed (gently!).
- Ripe tomatoes can usually be harvested by gently twisting them off the stem. For tomatoes wedged in next to other tomatoes by intersecting branches, use a scissor or a knife to free them.
- Know your tomato! Remember tomatoes come in lots of colors, ranging from peach and gold to purple and black, striped and solid. There are also many variations in size and shape — some that are perfectly round and others which form a tear drop.

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STORAGE

- If tomatoes fall off the vine before they're ripe, place them in a cool (50-60 degrees F), dry location indoors and out of direct sun to ripen. A warmer location (60-70 degrees F) will speed ripening. Direct sun will harden the skins and can speed up rot.
- Perfectly ripe tomatoes should be eaten right away for best flavor, but may hold up to a week in a cool, dry location. Do not refrigerate. The cold will destroy their flavor.
- Damaged and cut tomatoes will deteriorate rapidly; use them quickly.
- Tomatoes can be frozen whole. Core tomatoes, place on a cookie sheet and freeze. When solid, place tomatoes in freezer bags and replace in freezer. Thawed tomatoes work well in purées, soups or sauces.
- Salsas, sauces, paste, and purées can be canned. Consult a trusted home preservation guide for detailed instructions.

USE

- Tomatoes are fantastic eaten raw: sliced on a salad, a sandwich or with fresh mozzarella and olive oil, or added to guacamole or omelets.
- Tomatoes are very versatile — sauté, bake, broil, grill, stuff, add to shish kebab, and roast. Tomato chunks can be added to soups and stews, or tomatoes can be puréed as a soup base or stock, and of course made into amazing pasta sauces!
- Green, unripe, tomatoes can be breaded and fried for a late-season treat.

HOW MUCH DO I HAVE?

1 medium tomato = 1 cup of chopped tomato

2 large tomatoes = 3 medium tomatoes = 4 small tomatoes = 1 pound of tomatoes = 1-1½ cups of peeled, seeded, and chopped tomatoes = ¾ cup cooked tomatoes

GROWING GUIDE | PAGES

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MORE ON TOMATOES

[Johnny's Selected Seeds: Heirloom Tomatoes](#)

[Territorial Seed Co.: Heirloom Tomatoes](#)

SEED SAVING—BEGINNER

[University of California Cooperative Extension: Saving Tomato Seeds](#)

[Seed Savers Exchange: How to Save Heirloom Tomato Seeds \(with slide show\)](#)