

Our Favorite Tomatoes and How to Grow Them

There literally are 1000s of varieties of tomatoes. A few guidelines will help **YOU** choose what is right for your circumstances. **The sweetness and flavor of any tomato is largely dependent on how much sun and heat the plant gets.** All tomatoes will do best with a protective cover to keep them warm, even in the east county. Plant in the sunniest spot you have. Small fruited, cherry and grape types are likely to ripen earlier than large slicers. Choose varieties with the fewest ‘days to maturity’.

Understanding the growth habit of tomatoes can help you choose which variety is best for you.

Determinate (DET) varieties, sometimes called ‘**bush**’, are shorter plants that set a crop and then stop growing upward; many of these are very productive. They will generally fit in a large tomato cage.

Indeterminate (IND) varieties continue to grow and set fruit, they can get quite tall and should be staked and caged, or tied up on a trellis. Some varieties may be described as **compact-IND**, or **semi-DET.**, these are mid-size plants. No part of the tomato plant should ever touch the soil. There is **NO CORRELATION** between the size of the fruit and the size of the plant.

‘Heirloom’, Hybrid, OP and more: Heirloom varieties have been grown and handed down for many decades. Most are **IND**, many are touted as the ‘best tasting’, however some may not ripen in the maritime climate, some larger ones may not be very productive. **Hybrids** are crosses of two varieties, they can be more productive, may taste every bit as good and have some disease resistance bred in. **OP** (open pollinated) varieties include all heirlooms and some hybrids; the saved seeds will grow true to type.

‘Heirloom hybrids’ are a new class of crosses between two old varieties; a cross should result in a more vigorous productive plant. Another new type is ‘Artisan’. There are **NO GMO seeds** available to home gardeners so that is not a worry. **Choose varieties with the fewest number of days to maturity** which should be stated on the plant or package.

Most tomatoes will do well in a greenhouse with good ventilation, some varieties are bred for growing under cover. **All tomatoes require good nutrition and a constant supply of water to prevent ‘blossom end rot’.** When growing tomatoes in pots, be sure the container is large enough to support a large plant and has a deep water catch saucer to store excess water the plant can draw on. Potting mix should contain a good amount of water holding capacity with added coconut coir fiber or water hold ingredient. Potted plants must be watered frequently to keep the soil moist, at least every other day. Be sure to check the soil after watering to make sure it is wet in the middle, not just running down the sides! If it does not penetrate then you must water several more times to wet soil again.

Fertilizer should contain N-P-K., the major plant nutrients in a ratio of around 5-10-10, **plus micronutrients.** High nitrogen (N) will cause an excess of leafy, leggy growth and not much fruit, as well as attracting insects such as aphids. Too little phosphorus (P) or potassium (K) may result in slow growth and/or fewer fruits. Lack of adequate nutrition, including micro nutrients, may show up as discolored, or distorted leaves, or stunted plants. An organic fertilizer will release nutrients more slowly, feeding the plants longer and more evenly. Fertilizer and compost should be worked into the soil or potting mix prior to planting. A good liquid fertilizer should be applied at half strength right after planting and about every other week through the season, or as needed to promote steady growth of a green, husky plant that produces many flowers.

Tomatoes are easy to grow if you choose the right types and varieties for your situation, and follow guidelines for feeding, watering and protecting them. If you plant tomatoes inside or under cover where bees cannot visit them, you must brush the flowers and/or shake the plants nearly every day for the flowers

to set fruits. Keep them pruned a little to prevent leaves touching the soil and to allow air flow, and water only the soil, never on the leaves.

Some Favorite Tomatoes of Growers

Small Fruits, Cherry and Grape:

DET: RedRacer, Gold Nugget

IND: Orange Paruche, Sungold, Purple Bumble Bee, Lucky Tiger, Jelly Bean, White Cherry, Mountain Magic, Juliet, Sweet Baby Girl, Nova, White Cherry, Jelly Bean

SEMI-DET: Honey Bunch Grape, Geranium Kiss (excellent for pots and hanging pots)

Standard Slicing Tomatoes:

DET: BushSteak, Big Yummy, Sweet Tangerine, Bush Early Girl II, Siletz, Defiant, Celebrity Carolina Gold, Bush Early Girl, Bella Rosa

IND: Fourth of July, Jetsetter, Amish Gold, Siletz, Big Beef, Marbonne, Big Brandy

Plum:

DET: Marianna, Roma VF, Supremo