



How to Grow Prize-Winning Tomatoes

Everything tastes better when you raise it yourself. Growing your own tomatoes allows you to enjoy the fruits of your labor. Gardeners love to compete with other gardeners in their quest for growing the LARGEST tomato! For prize-winning tomatoes follow these recommendations.

WHERE TO PLANT

Choose an area that receives 6-8 hours of sunlight per day, located away from trees and plants that will compete for water and nutrients.

SOIL PREPARATION

For the biggest tomatoes and healthiest plants, make sure the soil has been prepared properly before planting. Tomatoes prefer a slightly acidic soil (6.5-7) but will grow in a wider range of pH.

Soils in this area have low levels of natural organic matter. For optimum growth, organic material should be added every time you work the soil. We recommend **Happy Frog Soil Conditioner** from FoxFarm. In every bag, you'll find finely screened, pH-balanced forest humus, earthworm castings and bat guano, not to mention beneficial microbes that stimulate root development and help plants access nutrients in the soil. Humic acid is also added to help increase the uptake of important micro-nutrients. Happy Frog Soil Conditioner is available in a 3 cu. ft. bale which will cover 18 sq. ft., 2" deep, enough area for about 6 tomato plants.

FERTILIZER

Tomatoes always benefit from a liquid fertilizer for initial plant development. This feeding is very important in the development of the plant. We recommend another product from FoxFarm, called **Grow Big®**. Get your garden going with Grow Big®, a fast-acting, water-soluble fertilizer for lush, vegetative, compact growth. Use Grow Big® early in the season when young plants need an extra boost. Earthworm castings and Norwegian kelp go into this special brew to encourage sturdier, healthier stems and leaves, and it also provides enough nutrients and trace minerals to create the kind of healthy branching that you'll need later in the season for more abundant buds and blooms.

Once the tomato plants are established, use Dynamite's **Mater Magic**, a completely Organic and OMRI certified fertilizer that contains the perfect food for tomatoes. It has micronutrients and calcium to prevent blossom-end rot and feeds up to 3 months. For bigger, juicier tomatoes, with higher yields, this natural plant food can't be beat. A couple of tablespoons of Mater Magic per plant will keep the plant going for weeks.

HOW TO PLANT

Before planting your tomato plants, harden them off outdoors for a few days. Place in an area protected from direct sun and strong winds. Remember to keep them well watered during the hardening-off process.

Tomato plants can be planted deeper than their container. Firm the soil well around the root system. Or, you may prefer the trench method. When ready to plant, pinch off all leaf stems up to the top cluster. Dig a trench long enough to lay the plant stem in with the leaf cluster pointed up. Cover the stem and root ball with soil leaving only the leaf cluster above the soil line. This method of planting will allow your tomato to set roots all along the planted stem.

After planting, sprinkle Hi-Yield **Weed & Grass Stopper** on top of the soil to prevent weeds from germinating.

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MULCH

Use mulch to discourage weeds and to keep the soil moist longer. We recommend **Cottonseed Hulls** which you can till into the soil at the end of the season.

STAKING

Keep stems and leaves off the ground by staking or caging tomatoes. This is also a good way to prevent the spread of disease. If you are using a tomato cage, make sure it's large enough to support the plant later in the summer.

The recommended date to start planting tomatoes is around mid April to early May. BUT...if you want to get a head start for an earlier tomato harvest...there are several things you can do. One trick is to, after adding soil amendments, lay out a sheet of black or red plastic to trap heat and warm the soil.

PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

- **Blossom Drop** - Use a tomato set spray to help set fruit on your tomatoes during periods of high temperature (above 90°), low temperature (below 55°) and high or low humidity. Don't count on 100% results. Many times it takes a change in the weather. Shade cloth may help in high temperature.
- **Poor Fruit Color** - High heat prevents pigment from forming. Pick tomatoes and let ripen indoors.
- **Blossom-End Rot** - Caused by rapid growth and/or fluctuations in moisture. Don't use too much nitrogen when fertilizing in the spring. Use drip irrigation or a mulch to sustain an even water supply to the plant. Use ferti•lome **Yield Booster** to help prevent blossom-end rot. It is a high-calcium foliar food that increases fruit size and helps prevent blossom-end rot. Tomatoes also benefit from having gypsum worked into the soil at planting time.
- **Cracking** - Caused by fluctuation in water available to plant. Choose crack-resistant varieties.
- **2,4-D Damage** - Tomato plants are susceptible to 2,4-D damage. Do not spray for lawn or garden weeds when it is hot and/or windy. If your neighbors spray for weeds—even three houses away—that, too, can affect your tomato plants.

PESTS—INSECTS

- **Spider Mites** - Natural Guard **Neem Py** or ferti•lome **Triple Action** - Combination products that will control both disease and insects and mites on vegetables and ornamentals. Keep a careful watch out for mites and spray before it becomes a big problem.
- **Aphids** - Usually seen in spring. Easy to control with Hi-Yield **Indoor/Outdoor Broad Use Insecticide** or ferti•lome **Triple Action**.
- **Hornworms** - Use ferti•lome **Carbaryl** or American **Thuricide**. Remove the hornworms by hand if you see them.

PESTS—DISEASE

- **Blight, Leaf Spot** - Spray with Natural Guard **Neem Py** or ferti•lome **Liquid Fungicide**. Mulches also help control spread of disease. Stake plants or use tomato cages. Plant resistant varieties. Rotate crops.

Please read and follow label directions.

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