



## Grow Prize-Winning Organic Tomatoes

### *Basics for a healthy organic vegetable garden*

Any number of problems can be avoided or minimized by good cultural practices in the garden. Tomatoes will prosper in loamy, well-drained soil with a pH level of 6.5 to 7. Get a soil test done! Amend your soil as needed! Each year work a few bags of Gard'n-Wise Cotton Boll Compost into your beds and add Bradfield Lawn and Garden Fertilizer (3-1-5) for the organic matter, fertility and extra acidity they bring to the soil.

Plant your tomatoes deep and they will root everywhere the stem touches soil, allowing the plant to develop a strong root structure to provide adequate water and nutrients.

You can purchase heavy-duty tomato cages at Johnson's or make 5' by 2' cages of concrete reinforcing wire and t-posts to support your plants.

Put down some form of drip irrigation at the base of your plants, whether it be a soaker hose or the more efficient RAINDRIP systems sold in our stores. No overhead watering, please! Tomatoes require at least an inch of water per week to thrive in our summer heat, but can have fungal problems from constantly damp leaves, or from soil splashed on the plant from below, so drip is definitely the way to go.

Use a mulch to retain moisture and cool root zones. We recommend straw or Cottonseed Hulls, which can be tilled into the soil at the end of the season.

Fertilize with Drammatic Organic Plant Food with Kelp every two weeks. Apply it at a rate of 3 tablespoons per gallon around the root zone of your plants (about 1/2 gallon per plant), or use as a foliar spray. (Organic gardeners who do not wish to use any animal products on their garden can use the Bonide Sea Green Kelp Extract in this same manner.)

Keep the garden bed well weeded! A handful of Gard'n-Wise Corn Gluten Fertilizer (9-0-0) as a side dressing when the first small fruits appear is useful for the nutrient value and for the weed suppressing properties of the corn gluten!

Picking most of your tomatoes "in the pink" before they are fully ripe will allow them to ripen indoors away from possible animal damage or rotting from overlooked fruit left on the vine.

Clean up the beds at the end of the season! Pests can over winter in dead plant material left in the garden until spring.

## *Common tomato problems that face Kansas gardeners and their solutions*

**Cutworm**--Cuts young plants off at ground level. A paper collar around each plant may stop damage, or use Concern Diatomaceous Earth around the plants.

**Aphid**--Sucks juices from the plants and weakens them. Leaves may be curled or distorted. Use a pyrethrins spray or release a package of ladybugs in the garden.

**Spider Mite**--Plant leaves will appear yellow and blotchy where mites are present. Tap the leaf over white paper to see the tiny mites. Apply a pyrethrins spray.

**Hornworm**--Eats big chunks of foliage. Spray American Thuricide.

**Blossom-End Rot**--Brown patch at bottom of the fruit, caused by a calcium deficiency or uneven watering. Make sure to evenly water plants, apply lime prior to planting, use Bonide Sea Green Kelp Extract as a foliar spray when new blossoms appear.

**Leaf Curl**--Leaves curl in or roll. Usually heat related, make sure plants stay evenly and regularly watered.

**Leaf Spot, Leaf Blight, Fungus**--Spots appear on leaves, leaves turn yellow and die. Do not top water! Spray with Green Light Neem Oil, Hi-Yield Copper or Hi-Yield Bordeaux.

### *Pat's Organic Container Tomato Recipe*

- One container (preferably at least 14" deep and 18" across the top, with good drainage)
- 32 qt. bag Premier Pro-Mix Ultimate Organic Mix
- 8 oz. packet Dr. Subler's Living Soil Earthworm Castings
- 42" wire tomato cage
- 2.5" (or larger) tomato plant (For my money, the best producing container tomatoes are the Roma varieties, such as Roma, La Roma, Viva Italian or San Marzano.)
- 32 oz. bottle Drammatic Organic Plant Food with Kelp

Place the potting mix and earthworm castings in the container. Mix well. Plant the tomato in the center, up to its first set of leaves. Place the cage inside the pot to support the plant as it grows. Add sunlight and water as needed (probably daily). Fertilize weekly with diluted Drammatic Organic Plant Food with Kelp. In about 8 weeks, when ripe, remove fruit from the vine and enjoy. Repeat until first freeze.