



DISAPPOINTING TOMATO CROP? BEST IS YET TO COME!

By **MEAGAN TERRY**
URBAN HARVEST CLASS COORDINATOR
www.urbanharvest.org

Our tomato season has been cut short, thanks to the heat wave. Usually we can produce up until July 4. Not this year! Once it is this hot, tomatoes won't set fruit any longer. The best we can do is keep an eye on any fruit that has already set. Take care of it until it is ready to pick and prepare for the fall tomato season! Tomatoes can be started from seed now. Two options:

- **TABLE TOP HYDROPONIC GROW KITS** with pods work really well. The main issue: Do not damage the roots when transplanting them from the hydroponic set up to a pot.



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Once the sprouts emerge and have true leaves, check the roots to see how big they are. Transplant them when roots are clearly visible but before a huge mass of roots has grown. If you wait too long, the roots get tangled in the little cages that hold the grow pods.

- **PLASTIC POTS AND GROW LIGHTS** Tomatoes are pretty reliable grown from seed. To start indoors in pots, essential is a very fast draining seed starting mix. Fill the pots with mix and poke two holes with your finger or a chopstick in each pot (an inch deep). Put 2 tomato seeds in each hole, so that is 4 seeds per small plastic pot. Cover the seeds with a little more of the seed starting mix and tamp it down just a little so that the seeds and the soil are touching – you want to get rid of the air pockets. Then gently water that in and keep moist for about a week. You can cover that with plastic wrap to help keep the moisture in.

You don't need to worry about light at this stage. Once sprouts appear, remove the wrap and put the pots under a grow light. A grow light set up can be as simple as a plant light bulb from the hardware store in a clamp-on can light.

Once they are up and growing, keep them moist but not soggy and choose the strongest one in each pot and cut off the others. The strong one is your one and only now. These will be ready to go into the ground or outside in a pot during our fall tomato planting time in August/September.

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**Determinate varieties include, l to r, Celebrity (slicer),
Ace 55 (slicer) and Tiny Tom (cherry type)**



**Indeterminate varieties include, l to r, Yellow Pear (small fruits),
Sweet One-Million (even smaller fruits), and Druzba (slicer)**

INDETERMINATE VS DETERMINATE TOMATOES If you are new to growing tomatoes or working with a small space, determinate tomatoes are better for your situation. On the seed pack, it will either say “indeterminate” or “determinate” – so read carefully before you buy.

Another thing to look for, when selecting seeds, is “Days to Maturity.” As you might have guessed, that is the days that it takes to bear fruit. For our hot climate, you want to choose a variety with a short DtM – something in the 50 to 70 day range.

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There are so many varieties from which to choose; narrowing it down to determinate and short season varieties will help you decide what type to try. If you have the space and can deal with the lankiness of the indeterminate types, that's an option.

Determinate varieties that I like include Celebrity (slicer), Ace 55 (slicer) and Tiny Tom (cherry type) and Indeterminate varieties include Yellow Pear (small fruits), Sweet One-Million (even smaller fruits), and Druzba (slicer). All our local nurseries have tomato seeds available and usually have plants ready to transplant by early September. Online sources are: Burpee, Park Seed, Eden Brothers, and Johnny's Seeds.

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