

Six Steps to Great Spring Tomatoes

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Picture your garden with large healthy plants loaded with ripe tomatoes, plump and bursting with flavor. Here are five simple steps to help you grow the crop of your dreams.

1) Select a Sunny Location. Sun is essential for productive plants with tasty fruit. Sun makes carbohydrates which are needed to set flower buds and which make the fruit tasty and sweet. At least 6 hours of sun is needed.

2) Prepare the Soil Well. Mix in several inches of well decomposed organic matter prior to planting. Raised beds may be needed to help drain away excess water. If you are growing your plants in containers don't use garden soil. Select a quality growing mix for best results.

3) Choose Adapted Varieties. Everyone has their favorite tomatoes and there are dozens of great choices. Select varieties with days-to-harvest intervals of 65 days or less. Those with over 75 days to harvest are less likely to produce a good crop in our climate.

Select varieties that are disease resistant. The letters after the variety name indicate disease resistance. For example, "VF1F2NTA" indicates resistance to Verticillium Wilt, two strains of Fusarium wilt, Root Knot Nematodes, Tobacco Mosaic Virus and Alternaria. A few suggestions:

* slicing type tomatoes : First Lady, Celebrity, Tycoon, Tygress, and Bush Early Girl. * small fruit types: Juliet (grape type), Sweet Million, Sun Gold, and the large cherry type Sweet Chelsea.

4) Plant Early. We have a very short spring growing season before the blazing heat of summer arrives and production drops. Start with varieties that set fruit quickly, plant them early and grow them fast. Cherry types are better about continuing to set fruit in the summer heat, but the skin can get tough during hot weather.



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You can plant several weeks before the last frost date if you wrap clear plastic around your tomato cages and fold the top over to form a mini greenhouse around each plant. Just open the top of the wrapped cages during the day to allow heat to escape.

5) Give Proper Care and Feeding. Water new transplants in with a starter fertilizer solution or fish emulsion and seaweed. Then feed them every few weeks using a product with a 4-1-2 or 3-1-2 ratio of nutrients. When they begin to set fruit you can increase the feeding to keep the plants vigorous and healthy. Keep the soil moist to avoid moisture stress. Keep an eye out for pests and diseases. Early detection and control is important.