

# Delicious Straight Off The Vine



While technically a fruit, most people consider tomatoes to be an essential part of the vegetable garden. Who can resist the delicious temptation of a tomato picked fresh from the vine? It comes as no surprise that the tomato is the most commonly grown vegetable in the U.S.



## Not all tomatoes are the same

First, determine what kind of space you want to put your tomatoes in.

Tomatoes come in two different types; *determinate* and *indeterminate*. As the name suggests, *determinates* have vines that grow to a determined point and stop, making them more compact and bushy (They are sometimes listed as bush tomatoes). *Indeterminates* are more viney than determinates; their vines continue to grow and need support. Determinates tend to be early; indeterminates are a good bet for later fruit. Obviously the determinates are better suited for small gardens; they are also a better bet for containers (although you could always provide a cage or trellis for indeterminates in containers).

## Selecting and purchasing your tomato

Be sure to pick out healthy plants with no yellowing or speckling on the leaves (fusarium or leaf spot). If you're not sure what tomatoes you want or need, checking the tag can be a big help in selecting a good tomato.

## Soil, sun and water requirements

Tomatoes require plenty of sun. As for soil, they will grow in just about

anything you throw at them. They do well when planted in containers, as soil can easily be changed or improved from year to year (raised beds are good for much the same reason). Uniform watering is the key to nice fruit. Even watering can prevent leaf-end roll, blossom end-rot, those misshapen crags and cracks on the stem end of the fruit. Can't say this enough; tomatoes are about the watering! Skimp on amendments, fertilizers and the rest, but if you want good tomatoes it's about the water.

## Planting tomatoes

It is OK to plant tomatoes in the garden when the temperature is a consistent 50° F, but plants won't begin to set fruit until the overnight low is regularly above 55°. Plant tomatoes approximately 2 to 3 ft. apart from each other or in rows three ft. apart with the plants spaced at a foot. Tomatoes should be planted deeply, you can plant them up to the first set of leaves, it will grow roots along the underground stem, making it stronger. This is a good method for indeterminate types in smaller gardens; you must simply keep the plant to a single main stalk.

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you can plant them up to the first set of leaves, it will grow roots along the underground stem, making it stronger. Run a pole over the length of your row and string 'em up! As your plants get larger, they will need to be staked in order to support the weight of the fruits as they begin to grow. Cages are a quick and easy fix that works great.

Tomatoes should be harvested when they are fully ripened and just starting to soften. Once picked, store tomatoes in dark, warm conditions.

## **DONOT REFRIGERATE TOMATOES!**

Fresh tomatoes start to fall off the flavor wagon as soon as they go below 55°; you might as well buy those soulless, tasteless clones at the supermarket.



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