



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. For best results don't plant in the same area of the garden two years in a row. This helps prevent disease problems that build up in the soil. If you have to plant in the same area due to space limitations, choose a resistant variety and prepare the soil well.

SOIL PREPARATION

For the biggest tomatoes and healthiest plants, make sure the soil has been prepared properly before planting. Begin by testing the soil pH. Tomatoes prefer a slightly acidic soil (6.5-7) but will grow in a wider range of pH. If your test shows a need to acidify the soil, add **Dr. Iron** at the recommended rate.

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 adding the following "ingredients", per 100 sq. ft., when preparing the soil for planting:

- Three 2-cu. ft. bags **Cotton Boll Compost** (adds organic material, breaks up clay soil, improves water retention in sandy soil)
- 4 lbs. **Hi-Yield Bone Meal** (rich in phosphorus)
- 4 lbs. **ferti•lome Gardener's Special** (11-15-11 balanced fertilizer)
- 40 lbs. **Gypsum** (loosens clay soil, supplies calcium to help prevent blossom-end rot)
- 1 lb. **Hi-Yield Weed and Grass Stopper** (prevents weeds from germinating)

Till the first four amendments into your soil before planting. After planting, sprinkle **Weed & Grass Stopper** on top of the soil to prevent grassy weeds (such as crabgrass) from germinating.

Another option when planting tomatoes is **Gard'n-Wise Choice Soil Conditioner**. It is a blend of Cotton Boll Compost, manure, alfalfa meal, cottonseed meal, feather meal and sulfur. Adding a little gypsum in the planting hole will supply calcium to help prevent blossom end rot, or you can spray with **ferti•lome Yield Booster** to add the needed calcium.

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 plant stem in with 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.

Water plants in with a starter solution of **ferti•lome Blooming & Rooting** (9-59-8). The high phosphorous content encourages root development and increases fruit production. Continue to use Blooming & Rooting weekly throughout the season. Tomatoes require at least an inch of water per week in our summer heat. Drip irrigation or a soaker hose at the base of plants is ideal to help reduce fungal problems caused by damp leaves.

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.

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 for planting tomatoes is around May 1st. **BUT**...if you want to get a head start for an earlier tomato harvest...there are several things you can do. After adding soil amendments, lay out a sheet of black or red plastic to trap heat and warm the soil. Transplant tomato plants into Wallo' Waters in early to mid March. They not only protect the transplant from wind, frost, hail and snow but also warm the ground beneath the plant (encouraging a strong root system) creating a warm, favorable environment for plant growth inside the Wallo' Water.

PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

- **Blossom Drop** - Use **ferti•lome Tomato Set** 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** - Use **Hi-Yield Garden, Pet & Livestock Insect Control, ferti•lome Triple Action** or other mite sprays. 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 Garden, Pet and Livestock Insect Control** or **ferti•lome Triple Action**
- **Hornworms** - Use **ferti•lome Carbaryl** or **American Thuricide**. Remove the hornworms by hand if you see them.
- **Nematodes** - Practice crop rotation and select resistant varieties.

PESTS—DISEASE

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