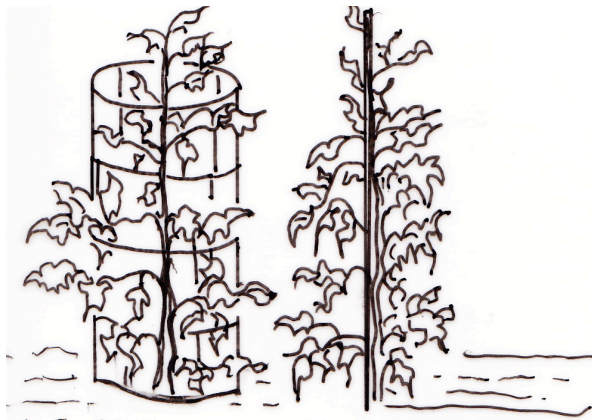


Growing Tips 3

GROWING TOMATOES



Tend your plants.

Tomatoes require care and feeding. Then, by nature, they run wild! It's your job to tend and guide them.

Feed them!

Fertilize with organic or synthetic products.

Organic methods focus on feeding the soil with products such as compost, blood, bone and feather meal, and wood ash.

Combinations of nutrients come in bags or as liquids, such as fish emulsion.

Synthetic fertilizers such as 5-10-5 or 10-10-10 provide nutrients more quickly.

All dry fertilizers should be raked into the top 2" of soil before planting, or applied 4" from the stem once or twice after first fruits appear. **Follow product recommendations** and water immediately after applying fertilizer.

Water

Plants need at least 1" of rain or supplemental water once a week to keep healthy and productive. **If it doesn't rain, water well, once or twice a week.** Avoid daily light watering and wetting the leaves.

How do you tell the plants have enough water? Use a trowel to open a pocket 4" – 6" deep in the soil and test with your fingers. The soil should be evenly moist and loose, not soggy!

Mulch with straw, or hay 3" - 4" thick - after the soil warms - to conserve moisture, keep vines and fruits clean and dry, and to reduce weeds. Red or black plastic mulches will also retain beneficial soil warmth.

Stake, cage or run? Choose one.

- **Use stakes at least 6' tall**, driven in the ground 12" – 18". Tie and prune the plants.
- OR,**
- **Use cages 18" – 24" in diameter, 4' – 5' high.** Buy ready-made, or make your own with welded wire or concrete reinforcing mesh.
- OR,**
- **Allow plants to run over a thick layer of mulch.** This method requires plenty of space and may result in loss of fruit to rodents and damp conditions. Wait until the soil warms before laying down the mulch.



Tomato Talk

Determinate varieties of tomatoes, sometimes called "bush" types, grow to a certain height, and then they stop. Some are perfect for containers; larger varieties need support, such as a wire cage.

Indeterminate plants keep growing until stopped by frost or pruning. Most popular varieties sold in garden centers fall in this category. **Stake these, or support with large cages.**

Disease resistance is bred into many tomato cultivars. The letters V, F, or N after the name indicates resistance to certain fungi, and viruses.

Heirloom varieties were grown in gardens prior to 1940; the seeds were handed down. Are they really tastier? Try one. If you're new to growing tomatoes, focus on the vigorous hybrids for more reliable success.

Hybrids exhibit particular traits - such as color, taste, ripening time - selected by plant breeders.



www.mass.gov/agr/

www.massflowergrowers.com/

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