



Tomatoes in the Garden

Tomatoes are related to tomatillos, and tomatillos will thrive in the same general conditions and care as tomatoes. Two different varieties of tomatillos may be needed for good fruit set.

Right Plant – Select varieties by how you want to use them and the space you have in your garden.

- Check the plant tag to find out the type of tomato that will be best in your space.
- Time to Maturity – Tomato varieties can have shorter (50 days) to long (85+days) growing times for fruiting from small transplants.
 - ◊ In the Portland metro area, choose a plant with short to medium growing period for best success.
- Growth Habit – Tomato varieties are grouped into 2 types based on how they grow.

Type of Tomato	Space Needed	Support Requirements	Growth Habit	Harvest
Determinate	less	can do with less support	bushy	fruits ripen about the same time
Indeterminate	more	need sturdy support	keeps growing	fruits ripen over a long time

- If planting in a pot, look for varieties that say “patio” or “suitable for containers.”

Right Place – Consider the amount of sun needed and whether you will use a container

- Tomatoes require lots of sun to produce well, 7 or more hours per day.
- Tomatoes prefer soil temperatures of at least 65 degrees and air temperatures of at least 60 degrees.
 - ◊ A soil thermometer, available at nurseries, can help determine if the soil is warm enough to prevent shock if the tomato is planted.
- You can start your tomato planting earlier if you use plant coverings to help warm the soil and keep young plants safe from frost.
 - ◊ Planting in raised beds or containers can help, because as air temperatures warm, the soil above ground level warms faster.
- In the ground:
 - ◊ Allow 1 to 3 feet for each plant, depending on plant type and space available. Water with a complete fertilizer.
 - ◊ Plant when danger from frost is past, and the soil is warming, generally early to mid-May.

GREAT GARDENS IN SMALL SPACES

Washington County Master Gardener™ Association

- In a container growth is limited by the size of the pot:
 - ◇ Determinate tomatoes can grow in a container that is a minimum of 12 inches deep, such as a 5-gallon bucket, although a larger container will allow for more growth.
 - ◇ Use a larger pot for indeterminate tomato types.
 - ◇ Use good quality packaged garden soil and mix in complete fertilizer.



Right Care – Paying attention to a few recommendations can maximize yield.

- Planting
 - ◇ Disturb the roots as little as possible when transplanting to the ground or your growing container.
 - ◇ Tomatoes can produce roots along the stem, so you can plant your tomato to a depth that leaves only the top 5-6 inches of plant showing. This makes a larger root system and encourages more growth.
- Fertilizing
 - ◇ Tomatoes can benefit from a good tomato fertilizer when planted and again mid-season when flowering and setting fruit.
 - ◇ Once fruit has set, stop fertilizing so that you don't encourage too much leafy growth.
- Watering
 - ◇ Avoid getting water on the leaves to prevent leaf disease.
 - ◇ Tomatoes prefer a consistent moisture level while growing and fruiting for best results. Inconsistent watering can lead to fruit cracking or blossom end rot.
 - ◇ If planted in ground, water deeply and thoroughly several days apart, rather than short, shallow sprinkling.
 - ◇ If planted in containers, water completely, and water again when the soil is dry 2 inches deep. Plants in containers will dry out faster than plants in the ground, so monitor closely.
- Supporting your tomato plants is helpful to keep them in a controlled area and the fruit off the ground.
 - ◇ Keep them upright as they get heavy with developing fruits, improve air circulation and discourage diseases and pests.
 - ◇ Supports can range from tall stakes with twine around the plant gently, to tomato cages or trellises. Check your local garden center for inexpensive ideas.



Right Help – Even with the right place, the right plant, and the right care, gardening questions arise from time to time. The following resources provide reliable information:

- Master Gardeners™ <https://bit.ly/MetroMG>
- “Grow Your Own Tomatoes and Tomatillos” OSU Extension Service <https://bit.ly/Growtomatoes>

More information:

