

HOW TO GROW

A wooden crate filled with ripe red tomatoes, with a vine of tomatoes hanging in the background. The scene is set outdoors with green foliage in the background.

AN ENDLESS SUPPLY OF TOMATOES

Dear Friend,

If I were told that I could only grow one vegetable (err...technically fruit, but that's irrelevant) in my garden, I would pick tomatoes.

Why? Because they're delicious, nutritious, easy to grow anywhere, and you can use them in so many ways that you'd likely never get sick of them. Oh, and did I mention that they come in an array of colors?

But which ones should you grow? How long do they take? Do they have particular needs? How much space do you need?

There's definitely a bit more to growing quality tomatoes than just grabbing a pack of seeds at the dollar store, but throughout the following report, you're going to learn enough to get you started.

P.S.: Remember that sharing is caring, so share this info with your friends that might benefit from this experience!

Alec Deacon

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Table of Contents

DISCLAIMER	5
Why to Grow Tomatoes for Survival	6
What to Choose from Different Types of Tomatoes	7
Slicing Fresh	10
Mr. Stripey	10
Black Krim.....	11
Big Rainbow	11
German Pink	12
Ace 55	12
Juice	13
Marglobe Supreme.....	13
Paste/Sauce Tomatoes	14
Roma	14
San Marzano	15
Orange Banana.....	16
Opalka	16
Cherry Tomatoes	17
Porter’s Dark Cherry	17
Black Cherry.....	18
Red Pearl Grape	18
Sun Gold.....	19
All-Around Tomatoes	20

Valencia Orange	20
Black Krim.....	21
Black Plum	21
Amish Pastes	21
Granny Cantrell.....	22
Cherokee Purple.....	22
Stupice.....	23
Container.....	24
Glacier	24
Bison.....	25
Bush Beefsteak	25
Grushovka	26
The Art of Growing Tomatoes	27
The Seeds	27
GMO.....	27
Hybrid.....	27
Open-Pollinated.....	28
Heirlooms	28
So What Seeds are Best?.....	29
Growing Conditions	29
What do Tomatoes Need to Grow?	29
Planting Your Tomatoes	31
Harvesting.....	33
Saving Seeds.....	34

How to Preserve Tomatoes.....	36
Refrigeration	37
Freezing.....	37
Paste	38
Chutney, Salsa, Etc.....	38
Can Your Tomatoes.....	38
Sun-dried Tomatoes	39
Juicing and Sauce	40
Whole, Crushed or Diced	42
Pickle Your Tomatoes	42
Basic Pickling Spice	43
Garlic Dill Pickling Spice	43
Spicy Pickling Spice	43
Make Tomato Powder	44
Survivopedia Articles About Growing Vegetables.....	46

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Why to Grow Tomatoes for Survival

You almost have to grow tomatoes for survival if you want your garden to be complete. Just a single cup of tomatoes provides about half of your RDA of Vitamin C (move over orange juice!), 25% of your RDA of Vitamin A, some Vitamin K just for kicks, and minerals including iron, potassium, folic acid, lycopene and calcium. Plus, tomatoes have been linked to cancer prevention.

Not too shabby for a little red, yellow, green, purple, orange, black, or pink fruit/vegetable, is it?



What to Choose from Different Types of Tomatoes

Many people grow several different varieties of tomatoes because there are so many uses for them. Just like anything else, most tomatoes are better for one purpose than another. For instance, if you want to grow tomatoes for juice and for eating raw, you'll likely want two different types of tomatoes.

Of course, there are definitely good all-around tomatoes, but variety is most certainly to spice of life. And since there's very little difference in planting and growing, why not grow different ones best suited to your individual needs?

Here are some of the reasons you may want to grow tomatoes:

- Slicing, or eating tomatoes
- Cherry tomatoes for salads
- Plum tomatoes for eating or cooking
- Juice tomatoes

- Sauce tomatoes
- Whole canned tomatoes
- Tomatoes for chutneys, etc.

Now, think about it. If you want to slice a nice, meaty tomato to put on your burger, you want plenty of “meat,” right?

But if you want to can whole tomatoes, you’ll want something a bit smaller, and with a different consistency. And of course, if you want a little tomato for a salad, you need yet another type. That’s the beauty of tomatoes; there are hundreds of options.

One of the first questions that many people new to gardening asks is, “What type of tomatoes should I grow?” Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to that question because if you ask a hundred people, you’ll get a hundred different answers. Or you’ll get the best answer of all – another question. “What do you want to use them for?” That’s where you should start.

Even in the most basic of grocery stores or farmers markets, you’ll find at least a handful of different types of tomatoes. You’ll likely find cherry tomatoes of some sort, Roma tomatoes, which are the elongated ones, and, of course, the “regular” tomatoes – the ones that you use for burgers and whatnot.

If you go to larger farmers markets, you’re apt to find tens of different types of tomatoes in different shapes, sizes, and colors. That’s when it gets really confusing, especially if you’re trying to decide what kinds to grow. The best thing that you can do is talk to the vendors.

If you’re at a farmers market, you’re in a good place to find out which tomatoes grow best locally. You also have the advantage of being in a place where people are likely passionate about what they do, and know a lot about it, too. Don’t be afraid to pick their brains if they’re not slam busy – farmers tend to be a friendly lot.

If you’re making your tomato decisions all on your own, there are a few questions that you need to ask yourself to narrow down your options.

- What do you want to do with your tomatoes (juice, canning, slicing, salads, etc.?)
- How long is your growing season?
- How much space do you have?

What type of soil you have is important, too, because tomatoes are a little finicky, especially when it comes to water. Don't let that intimidate you – just know what your plants like before you grow them so that you can make them happy. If you do, they'll gladly give you lots of fruit for your consideration!

To help you decide which tomatoes may be good for you, let's address these questions together. We'll group them by their use, then tell you about their growing needs so that you can easily flip through this report and find what the tomato – or tomatoes – that are right for you. Don't be afraid to grow more than just one type.

We're also going to include information when tomatoes that are particularly suited to cold areas with short growing seasons, ones suited for hot, humid climates, and tomatoes that are particularly good for indoor container gardening.

For the sake of helping you be successful, we're going to stick to heirlooms and open-pollinated plants because those are the ones most likely to produce seeds that will reliably replicate from season to season. We've also chosen ones that are disease-resistant and easy to grow. There are several types, such as Brandywines, that are delicious and multi-purpose, but they're finicky, so we didn't include them. We wanted to make your tomato-growing endeavors as error-proof as possible!

There are two types of tomato plants – indeterminate (vining) and determinate (bush). Indeterminate plants need to be staked or trellised so that the vines have somewhere to go other than climbing across the ground so that the fruit doesn't rot or get eaten by every tomato-loving insect and critter in your garden.



Slicing Fresh

These are the types of tomatoes that go great on burgers or even just sliced on a plate. They're full of flavor and have excellent meaty textures.

Mr. Stripey

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Hybrid
- Height: 8-10 feet
- Color: yellow and red striped. Flesh is yellow with red splotches
- Grow period: 80 days
- Fruit size: 10-20 oz.

These tomatoes (you see them in the picture above) bring back great childhood memories of sneaking tomatoes out of the garden to eat right off the vine because they

were so sweet and juicy. They're meaty and the plants are prolific, so cage or stake them to support the weight.

Black Krim

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: burgundy to dark purple
- Grow period: 60-80 days
- Fruit size: 8-16 oz.

This large indeterminate is dark, blackish-purple when it's ripe and tastes amazing! Sweet with hints of wine and saltiness. It's a Russian heirloom that holds a place in many seasoned tomato lovers' gardens.

Make sure you give it plenty of room because it takes up quite a bit of space, is prolific, and the tomatoes are medium to huge. Harvest them as soon as they're ripe to prevent cracking and use them within a few days or else they'll turn soft.

Big Rainbow

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 6 feet+
- Color: Bi-colored red/orange/yellow, yellow flesh with red splotches
- Grow period: 82 days
- Fruit size: 16-32 oz.

Doesn't this just sound pretty? It's a huge, orange tomato with red streaks and splotches inside of it. It's resistant to disease resistant and though it has a long growing cycle, the huge fruits are worth it. Plant another variety of early bloomers and you'll have delicious slicers through the first frost.

German Pink

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red/pink
- Grow period: 75-80 days
- Fruit size: 14-18 oz.

When you think of your granny's odd-shaped, delicious garden tomatoes, these are possibly what she was growing. They're juicy, meaty and lower in acid, and the vines will bear fruit all summer long. You have to cage them or stake them strongly because of the sheer size of the tomato.

Ace 55

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red
- Grow period: 80 days
- Fruit size: 7 oz.

Red, thick-walled and stand up well to temperatures, so they're great for kabobs as well as slicing. They grow to about the size of a tennis ball and are low-acid, so they're not the best for canning. Disease-resistant.



Juice

To state the obvious, these tomatoes (you see them in the picture above) are going to be flavorful, but may perhaps have a different texture, less meat, and more juice than you may want in a slicing tomato.

Marglobe Supreme

- Plant Type: Determinate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red
- Grow period: 75-80 days
- Fruit size: 6 oz.

This is a high-acid tomato that's great for canning as well as slicing. It grows to about the size of a baseball and is great to can in quarters or to use for juice.



Paste/Sauce Tomatoes

Making tomato paste is a time-consuming process because you have to cook them down as much as possible, pass the pulp through the sieve, then spread it out and dry it (usually in the oven). Though it's a lot of work, in the end, you'll have a great-tasting paste that can be reconstituted for a wide variety of sauces, soups, and other uses.

Sauce tomatoes will have fewer seeds and more meat than your typical tomato and will be packed with flavor. They tend to be more robust than sweet, which makes them ideal for a wide mix of sauce recipes.

Roma

- Plant Type: Determinate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red

- Grow period: 73-80 days
- Fruit size: 3 inches

Though this is actually a specific variety of tomato, the word “Roma” has become kind of generic for any elongated tomato.

Know before you grow whether or not it’s actually a Roma or if somebody is just using the term generically as a “Roma-style” tomato.

The Roma is great for sauces, canning whole or quartered, using in fresh pasta dishes, slicing, or for sauce. They have a growing cycle of 75 days and are resistant to verticillium and fusarium wilts. It bears its crop over a 3-4-week period, which makes it easy to can big batches of sauce and salsa.



San Marzano

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red/pink
- Grow period: 85-90 days
- Fruit size: 5-6 oz.

This plant grows fruit that are long and narrow with little pointed tip on the bottom. They’re meaty, with fewer seeds than many other plum tomatoes. It has a strong, sweet flavor that’s a bit less acidic on the tongue.

It’s actually a pretty famous tomato with some illustrious claims. It’s the fruit of choice for many of the Italian-branded whole canned tomatoes and is the only tomato that can be used in Vera Pizza Neapolitana (True Neapolitan Pizza). Most importantly for us, its seeds are stable, it’s multi-use, and it’s prolific.

Orange Banana

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: orange
- Grow period: 85 days
- Fruit size: 2-3 oz. 3 inches

Named because of its longer shape with a pointy tip, this orange plum-type tomato is a great all-purpose tomato that's best for paste but is also good for eating fresh or making sauce or salsa. It may not look traditional, but it will taste fantastic! Disease-resistant.

Opalka

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 6+ feet
- Color: red
- Grow period: 80 days
- Fruit size: 6-8 oz. 5-inches

Fruit has very few seeds and is extremely meaty and loaded with sweet flavors that make it great for sauce or paste. Foliage tends to be wispy, so it won't take up quite as much space as some other plants. It's also good for drying. Disease-resistant.



Cherry Tomatoes

These little gems that you see above are great for veggie platters, salads, and – sometimes – canning whole or juicing. Just remember that if you use them for canning, you’re going to need a lot of them.

Fortunately, the plants that we’re listing are all prolific and if you have more than a couple of plants, you’re going to be flooded with bite-size delights.

Porter’s Dark Cherry

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Open Pollination
- Height: 6+ feet
- Color: deep burgundy
- Grow period: 74 days
- Fruit size: 1-2 inch

Excellent yielding plant grows in clusters of 6-10 fruits. They're oblong, small, and oval. This is one of those all-around tomatoes that we mentioned – great for snacking, canning, and juice. It grows all season, so you really get a ton of bang for your buck.

Black Cherry

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Open Pollinated
- Height: 6+ feet
- Color: deep purple/mahogany
- Grow period: 64 days
- Fruit size: 1 inch

This is a prolific plant that produces unusually colored fruit that grow in huge clusters. They're sweet, rich, and complex and blends well in a salad with other colors. Black cherries are great for snacking, salads, cooking sliced in fresh pasta sauces, or canning whole or as sauce.

Red Pearl Grape

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Open Pollinated
- Height: 4 feet
- Color: red
- Grow period: 58 days
- Fruit size: 1 oz.

These red cherry tomatoes are about the size of a large cherry and are great for snacking or tossing in a salad. They're firm and cook well in fresh pasta-type dishes or on kabobs. Fewer seeds make them good for canning whole, too. They're extremely prolific and disease-resistant.

Sun Gold

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: up to 10 feet
- Color: orange
- Grow period: 55-65 days
- Fruit size: 1 oz.

These yellow/orange tomatoes are loved by people who don't even like fresh tomatoes. It has a short grow season, so you'll have nice slicers in less than 8 weeks. The plant is indeterminate, bears heavy crops and will keep producing through the growing season. They grow and ripen in long clusters that have 10-15 fruits and the flavor is there a week before the full color sets on.

Disease-resistant and good for containers as long as you stake them. Plant one per 12-inch-diameter container.



All-Around Tomatoes

If you have limited space or don't want to mess with growing several different types of tomatoes, these are some great examples of a tomato that will serve a variety of purposes. Just a good old-fashioned, all-around tomato!

Valencia Orange

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom and Open Pollinated Varieties
- Height: 6 feet
- Color: orange
- Grow period: 76 days
- Fruit size: 8-10 oz.

An orange, tennis-ball sized tomato that is delicious to use in salads, salsas and to make sauce. It'll be orange, but it'll be delicious! It's low-acid, so if you're going to can it, you'll need to add vinegar. Grows well in cooler climates.

Black Krim

Yes, even though we listed it as an amazing slicer – which it is – it's great for juice and sauce, too.

Black Plum

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 6 feet
- Color: deep mahogany
- Grow period: 82 days
- Fruit size: 2 inch elongated, plum-shaped

This plum tomato is similar to a paste tomato but has thinner walls. It's sweet, tangy, rich and complex. Great for snacking, sliced into a salad or into a rustic pasta sauce, or for canning sauce.

Amish Pastes

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 6 feet
- Color: deep red
- Grow period: 85 days
- Fruit size: 8-12 oz.

This is a prolific red tomato that's one of the largest paste tomatoes out there. It has thick walls and sweet flavor with no core. It's great for sauces, salsas, ketchup, sliced and tossed into fresh pasta dishes, salads, and slicing.

Granny Cantrell

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Open Pollinated
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red
- Grow period: 85 days
- Fruit size: 16-32 oz.

A great beefsteak tomato that has a flatter appearance and a heavy yield. It's sweet, meaty, juicy, and sweet. One slice will be more than enough for a sandwich! Good for slicing, cooking, or canning.

Cherokee Purple

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red/pink
- Grow period: 80-90 days
- Fruit size: 10-12 oz.

Large, beefy tomatoes that range in color from a dark burgundy to purplish color. They're large and meaty with a well-balanced taste. It has a natural tolerance to disease, produces early, and yields a moderate amount of fruit. They need to be staked or caged to hold the weight of the fruit and you'll likely get around 20 or so fruit from each plant.

Stupice

- Plant Type: Indeterminate Heirloom
- Height: 4-6 feet
- Color: red
- Grow period: 40-50 days
- Fruit size: 2-3 inches

Bursting with rich, sweet, tangy flavor and grows well in cold climates as well as high elevation/hot climates. It sets early, has a heavy yield, and grows throughout the season. Meaty and great for slicing, salads, sauces, juice, and ketchup. Disease-resistant.



Container

Some tomatoes just lend themselves to container gardening and there are even species that have been specifically cultivated for use in baskets and containers and many of them are great for canning.

No matter where you live, there's no reason to go without tomatoes. These are just a few that we found to get you started.

Glacier

- Plant Type: Determinate Heirloom
- Height: 3 feet tall, 3.5 feet wide
- Color: orangey red
- Grow period: 55 days
- Fruit size: 2-3 inch

Meaty, sweet and delicious. Easy to grow even inside in containers because of the size, and it produces throughout the season. These will start setting fruit early and will grow all season. They're prolific. Grows well in cooler climates as well as warmer ones. Good for salads, sauce and juice. Disease-resistant.

Bison

- Plant Type: Determinate Heirloom
- Height: 3 feet tall, 3 feet wide, maximum
- Color: red
- Grow period: 70 days
- Fruit size: 2-3 inch

These are low-maintenance plants that don't require staking or even much pruning though it will produce huge amounts of beautiful round tomatoes with a rich, complex, and slightly acid flavor. Great for juice, sauce, canning whole, or eating fresh. Produces well in cooler weather as well as warmer climates.

Bush Beefsteak

- Plant Type: Determinate Heirloom
- Height: 3 feet tall
- Color: red
- Grow period: 62 days
- Fruit size: 8-10 oz.

Who says you have to have a ton of outdoor space to grow beefsteak tomatoes? This determinate stays short and bushy, and produces a ton of tomatoes in clusters. Great for short-growing regions as well as warmer climates. Great for slicing, sauce, and possibly juice.

Grushovka

- Plant Type: Determinate Heirloom
- Height: 3 feet tall
- Color: pink/red
- Grow period: 65 days
- Fruit size: 2-3 inch

These Siberian plum tomatoes are extremely tasty and are a great choice for container gardening. The plant is bushy and great for both eating and canning – juice, sauce, and paste.

All you have to do is find the ones you like best!



The Art of Growing Tomatoes

The Seeds

There are four main types of seeds out there: GMO, hybrid, heirloom, and open pollination.

GMO

These seeds have been genetically modified at the DNA level in a lab. They're meant to make the seed better in some form or another. However, because the plant has been altered at the genetic level, you may find it difficult to get the next generation of seeds to grow, or to produce tomatoes that are the same as the ones in the first generation.

Hybrid

These are often mistaken for GMO, but they're vastly different. They're a naturally-occurring plant that occurs when one variety pollinates with another. Think of the

hybrid as a family – a mother and dad get married and have a child that shares their traits – hopefully the best of each parent.

Hybrids have no problem growing but may not be consistent from one generation of seeds to another. First generation plants and fruit tend to be more consistent in size and shape and are often more disease resistant than heirlooms, but you don't know what you're going to get next year.

Open-Pollinated

These plants are the result of plants that are grown close together pollinating each other in a natural manner. You'll have some genetic variability because of this, and when the seed is saved, those traits are passed onto the next generation. Open-pollination tomatoes are often regionally unique and have unusual shapes, colors and flavors.

These are the seeds that most farmers count on, because they're reliable. You can save the seeds with a high degree of confidence that they'll grow next year.

Heirlooms



The queen of seeds. Heirloom tomatoes come from seeds that have been carefully preserved for generations – usually 50 years or more.

They're carefully tended so that the traits are consistent from one generation to another. The one trait that heirlooms have is that the fruit can vary greatly in size and shape even on the same plant.

That's not always the case, and it's not really a bad thing – just something to make note of when you're growing them.

Heirlooms grow consistently from one year to the next, so you can save your seeds and have the same exact plant next year.

So What Seeds are Best?

Many people grow hybrids and love them; for that matter, I have too. But if I'm saving seeds, it's the ones from my hybrids and open-pollinated ones because I know that they'll grow and I know what I'll get.

Growing Conditions

This is yet another trait that I love about tomatoes – no matter where you live, there's a variety that will grow for you. Well, almost. If you live in an area that has no warm weather to speak of, or an extremely short (less than 50 day) growing cycle, your choices are limited unless you want to grow them inside, or in a greenhouse.

Altitude affects every single aspect of growing – temperature, soil conditions, precipitation, and humidity. In high-altitude climates, you often have short growing seasons, soil that's either rocky and alkaline or shaded and acidic, too much rain, not enough rain, and a ton of wildlife that's just waiting for you to grow them some delicious food.

But don't despair, you can grow great tomatoes just about anywhere you want as long as you're willing to put in the effort.

What do Tomatoes Need to Grow?

I read a story about a couple who invested all of their summer into a tomato crop only to yield a single fruit. They'd gone out of town one weekend and forgotten to tell their friends to water them, and that's what did it.

Now of course, that's a tall tale, but it's not far off. Tomatoes need a consistent amount of water, especially when the fruit is ripening. But if you water them too much during this period, they'll be washed out and flavorless.

So if your tomato could pick its ideal situation (and it can because if you don't listen, it won't grow) what would it be? There are some variances in their needs, such as length of growing seasons, but in general, the necessary components to successfully growing tomatoes are:

Temperature

Tomatoes need an average of 3-4 months of warm, fairly dry weather to grow and produce well. In order to "set" fruit – a gardening term that means that your plant will produce fruit after flowering and pollination. Generally, they need nighttime temperatures of 55-75 degrees F for this to happen. They won't develop the proper color if night time temps are above 85, and most will quit growing if nighttime temps are over 95 degrees. Now, there are tomatoes that thrive in hot weather, so if this is your situation, do some research and find them. Otherwise, you're wasting your time.

Sunlight

Your plants need at least 6 and preferably 8 hours of sunshine per day. If you live somewhere temperate, 8 is great. If you live in the sweltering south, then 6 with a nice shady afternoon will be appreciated.

Consistent Watering

This part is SUPER important. You want your soil to be moist but not wet. Too much will kill the plant, too little will stop the fruit from growing, or will give it a poor texture and flavor if it does grow.

Proper, Regular Feeding

Tomatoes like nitrogen in the soil, so prepare the soil with ripe compost and a scoop of aged manure in the bottom of the hole when you plant it. Another trick is to add some Epsom salt to the soil monthly.

You can do this via just sprinkling a couple teaspoons around the plant, or by mixing a couple of tablespoons in a gallon of water and watering your plants with it. Be careful

though, because too much nitrogen will give you a beautiful plant but will delay ripening. Add nitrogen when the top leaves turn yellow and the stem turns purple.

Loose Soil that Drains Well

Honestly, they prefer this but will grow in nearly any type of soil as long as you provide the proper nutrients. If you have plants that harvest early, sandy loamy soil is best. Plants that bear fruit late like heavier loamy clay. They also like slightly acidic soil with a pH somewhere between 6 and 7.

Take Care of the Roots and Leaves

Tomatoes are a good plant to start inside because if you live in most zones, you want your plants to be 8-10 weeks old when you set them out 2 weeks or so after the last frost. It's important that you wait this long because if you get an "oops" freeze, your plants are done.

You also need to protect them from wind that can break them and try to keep the vines off of the ground to help protect them from mold and bugs. Bugs love tomatoes, so be proactive in your insect prevention and check the leaves, top and underside, regularly.

Planting Your Tomatoes

Ok, not that we have that set aside, let's talk about how to grow your plants. This is the exciting part – well, one of them anyway!



It's best to prep your soil a week or two in advance by turning in some aged manure and compost. A bit of Epsom salt may help too, if your soil is low in nitrogen.

Rest easy – though salt will kill your soil, Epsom salt isn't actually sodium – it's actually magnesium and sulfur.

The magnesium helps your plant absorb nitrogen.

Some people just dig the hole for the plant and plop a trowel full of compost/manure in the bottom. This may be OK, but make sure that both are well-aged so that you don't burn up your plants. I'd recommend mixing it into the soil.

If you started your plants from seeds, they should be at least 8 weeks old now, and you should harden them off for a week or so before you plan to plant them out doors. This just means that you'll start putting them out for a couple of hours per day, protecting them at first from the sun and wind, then gradually increasing their time spent outside so that it's not such a shock when you actually transplant them.

Now, let's plant. You can plant them in your garden, or tomatoes make excellent container plants. 5-gallon buckets work great.

- Dig a hole with your trowel about 6-8 inches deep. Remember that your soil should be loose. Pull off the bottom few leaves of the plant, then put it in the ground so that the root ball is buried and the remaining leaves are above the surface of the ground.
- Plant them about 2 feet apart.
- Water well to help reduce shock to its roots.
- Stake or cage immediately. This doesn't seem like a big deal now, but trust me – in a few weeks when they're growing like gangbusters, you won't find it nearly so easy as you do right now.

Water your plants well for the first few days to help prevent shock and help it to acclimate. Water consistently throughout the season so that your soil stays at about the same saturation. In some growing conditions, you may be able to get away with watering once a week, but 2 or 3 times is better. They'll need about 2 inches per week.

Just a tip here – using homemade mulch is a great idea because it helps hold moisture in AND it helps fertilize at the same time. You can put the mulch down when you plant or you can wait a few weeks to do it. Don't forget about liquid manure compost, either.

Keeping a steady fertilization schedule is good, too, Follow the tips above about that.

When your plants begin to vine and you get them staked, it's a good idea to pinch off sucker leaves – those leaves that don't lead to more vine but only exist to suck the moisture from your plant.

Wait for your bumper crop of tomatoes to appear!

Old Timers' Trick – if you're having a drought, place flat stones around your plants. They help pull water up from deeper in the earth and also hold onto it so that it doesn't evaporate.

Harvesting

Once your tomatoes are harvested, store them at room temperature or in the cellar because temperatures below 55 degrees (refrigerating) them degrades the taste and texture of them.

You worked too hard for that to happen! Store them with their stems and caps for best results.



Tomatoes will ripen if you pick them when they're green, but it's best to let them (almost) ripen on the vine. Many also develop their full flavor before the color is fully developed, so do the touch test to check. If it's firm but gives a bit to your touch, try a sample because it's likely ready. Don't leave them on the vine once they're ripe because they'll crack.

Once you pick them, plan to use them within just a few days, whether you're eating them fresh or canning them. Many tomatoes, especially plum and cherry tomatoes, lend themselves well to drying, too.

Just a final word – tomatoes are finicky about watering and nutrients. Study the type of soil and water requirements for your chosen plants before you plant them so that you can prepare the soil.

Saving Seeds

Seeds are dependably good for 3-5 years. Do a test-germination with 10-20 seeds or so to determine your germination percentage before you plant your garden so that you don't end up planting seeds that don't grow.

But before you're ready to plant them, you need to save them from your tomatoes. This is a fairly simple process, but it's not as easy as just plucking them out and drying them. Pretty close, though.

You've probably noticed that tomato seeds are kind of slimy. That's because they're encased in a gelatinous sack that contains chemicals that keep the seeds from germinating inside of the tomato. Naturally, the tomato would fall to the ground, ferment, rot, and the gelatinous sack would be destroyed during this process.

We have to duplicate that fermentation process for two reasons: first, it will remove that sack, and it will also destroy any seed-borne diseases.

Start with a very ripe tomato and cut it in half horizontally. Squeeze the seeds and juice into a cup (or two if it's a large tomato) and label it with the variety. Set the cup aside to ferment for about 3 days. Put it somewhere where the fruit flies and fermentation odor won't bother you. Because it will stink. They'll also get moldy – that's natural and is actually what we're waiting on.

When mold covers the top of the juice, add about equal amounts of water to juice and stir. The good seeds will sink to the bottom of the cup and the bad ones – ones that are hollow or have molded – will float. Pour off the mold, bad seeds, and liquid, keeping the good seeds at the bottom.

Next, spread the good seeds on a glass or ceramic plate to dry. Make sure you label the plate with the variety. It will take about 10-15 days for the seeds to dry. When they're completely dry, put them in an envelope and label with variety and date. Store in a dark, dry, cool place. If you store them properly, they'll last 5-10 years.

We hope that the information in this report has been useful to you. Tomatoes are a versatile food to grow because you can use them in so many ways (and there are so many varieties) that it would be tough to get tired of them. Since they're also nutritious and can be grown in containers that are portable or easy to hide, it's a no-brainer that they should be a staple crop for you.

This was only meant to be a starting guide – check for plants that grow well in your conditions and familiarize yourself with your local soil conditions and growing seasons. And then, enjoy your tomatoes!



How to Preserve Tomatoes

Now comes the fun part. The best way that I like to preserve my tomatoes is in between two slices of bread – oh wait, it doesn't last long like that! Seriously though, there are a number of ways that you can preserve your tomatoes.

Each way ends up using a canning method, but there are many different ways that you can prepare them for preservation including sun-drying and adding to olive oil, or dehydrating.

First, it's important to know what you're going to use the tomato for. There are so many varieties that it's impossible to say, "This is how you should prepare any tomato", so we're going to talk about options, and you can decide which ones are right for your crop.

Before we talk about preserving them, you need to know that tomatoes will continue to ripen even after they've been picked. You can actually pick them when they're nearly green, set them in the windowsill, and they'll ripen on their own. That's important to know, so that you understand that you have a limited window to prepare them for storage.

Refrigeration

This is, of course, the most common way of storing tomatoes that you're going to eat within a week or so.

I always clean mine and pop the stems off if possible before I put them in the fridge, but that's just to save a little time later. To keep them the longest this way, put them in the crisper drawer.

Freezing

Most people don't think about freezing tomatoes, but it's a good way to go as long as you have the freezer space. Of course, they aren't going to be the same as a fresh tomato, but frozen tomatoes are great in sauces and soups.

You can blanch them, peel them, then freeze them, or just freeze them whole with the skins on. You can also puree them first, or even just chop them into chunks. If you're going to use that method, peel them first.

This is my preferred method because if something happens and you don't get to them in time, the skin helps protect them from freezer burn. The downsides here are that they take up so much space, and if the power goes out, you have to use them immediately.

Paste

The process of making tomato paste is similar to making the juice except you cook it WAY down into a super thick sauce, then add olive oil and salt and bake it in a 200-degree oven, spread evenly in pan, until it's the thickness of tomato paste.

Chutney, Salsa, Etc.

This is possibly the best part! Make your favorite salsas and chutneys with tomatoes, onions, garlic, herbs, and other spices and can them up so that you have some of this deliciousness year round!

Can Your Tomatoes



I've found that canning tomatoes is my preferred method. Since tomatoes are acidic, you may safely can them using the water bath method. If you have smaller tomatoes, you could can them whole, or if you'd rather, you could quarter, chop, dice, or puree them first. Again, it all depends on what you want to use them for.

When canning tomatoes, you don't just have to can plain, whole or quartered tomatoes. You can mix in some cilantro, onions, or other goodies to make salsa or chutney. They're also great juiced, pureed or cooked down

into tomato sauce or paste.

Don't forget about spaghetti sauce, either! You can even throw in some meatballs if you'd like, though I personally find canned meatballs a little weird.

You should skin your tomatoes before you can them but that's not as hard as it sounds. Just bring a pot of water to boil, then dip the tomato in for a few seconds, transfer it to a bowl of ice water, and the skin will slide right off.

Sun-dried Tomatoes

Though most people refer to any type of dried tomato as a sun-dried tomato, you can also use your oven or dehydrator. Most people don't live in a climate that's dry enough and warm enough to actually dry them completely in the sun. Regardless of which method you use, preparation for preserving your tomatoes in this manner is the same.

Wash the tomatoes then remove the stem, core, and any bruised or bad spots. If you want, you can scald them to remove the skins. That's completely optional. Cut them in half, or quarter them if they're longer or wider than 2 inches.

If you'd like, gently squeeze the seeds out without losing the pulp. You can scrape them out if you'd rather. Sprinkle them with salt and any other seasoning you'd like to add. Remember that you're drying them, so a little salt goes a long way.

Some people prefer to soak the tomato slices in vinegar for a few minutes before dehydrating in order to kill germs. I don't, but feel free to do so if you want.

Drying them in the sun requires hot days with little humidity, and will take about 3-4 days. Make a box with nylon netting on the bottom.

Lay your tomato pieces on the netting with the cut side down. Cover with cheesecloth or some other breathable material to keep the bugs out.

After a day and a half or so, flip the tomatoes over so that the cut side is up. If you live in a place that



has heavy dew at night, or if it's going to rain, bring the tomatoes into a dry place at night or until it quits raining.



Drying tomatoes in the oven is easy. Place the tomatoes cut side up on a baking sheet and set your oven to 175-200 degrees F.

Put your tomatoes in the oven, leaving the oven cracked a little.

After about an hour and a half, turn them over and gently squish them flat with a spatula.

Leave them in the oven for another hour and a half or so, then check to see if they're leathery to the point that they aren't sticky, but aren't so

dried that they get tough.

At this point, you have a couple of options. If you'd like, you may can them in oil and seasonings. If that's your plan, you don't have to be quite as careful of the moisture content. If you're going to completely dry them, leave them in the oven until they're about as leathery as a dried apricot. If you don't dry them long enough, they'll mold.


Drying your tomatoes in a dehydrator is basically the same process except it will take several more hours. When I dry mine in the dehydrator, I like to flip them every couple of hours to ensure even drying.

Just like with any other dried food, the shelf-life isn't as long as if you can them, but you can dry-can them, freeze them or vacuum seal them to extend shelf life.

Juicing and Sauce

I can't even tell you how many tomatoes I've mashed through a sieve with a wooden pestle to make juice! All you need to do is cut your tomatoes into quarters and toss them

into a saucepan. Bring them to a boil for 5 minutes to soften them up and get the skins all loose. The juice will start separating out.



ROASTED TOMATO SAUCE

- 5-6 pounds medium or small tomatoes, stems removed
- 1 medium head of garlic, peeled
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup fresh basil leaves
- kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 250 F, and place the tomatoes on a baking sheet with a raised 1-inch lip. Add the garlic cloves and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil. Top with torn basil leaves and season with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper.
2. Bake for 4 hours or until tomatoes are soft and bursting.
3. Allow to cool then pour into a blender in batches. Pulse 2-3 times then blend for 1 minute or until desired chunkiness.
4. Pour into quart jars or pour into freezer bags to freeze flat.

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After they've simmered for that five minutes, turn off the heat and pour some of them over into your sieve or food mill (which is over a pot or bowl, of course) to separate the juice from the skins and seeds. Mash them through and pour the juice back into a pan and bring to boiling again for another 5 minutes, then can.

You should add a tablespoon of lemon juice to each pint just to boost the acidity enough to preserve it. I also add in a teaspoon of salt per quart (1/2 tsp. per pint).

Water bath can as usual or 35 minute for pints and 40 minutes for quarts. If you're pressure canning, it's 15 minutes for pints and 20 for quarts.

Note that your juice may “clarify”, or separate so that the bottom is dark red with the tomato pulp in it and the top is almost clear. This is perfectly normal – just shake it up before you use it.

If you want to make sauce instead of juice, it’s simply a matter of cooking it longer so that the water evaporates and the juice thickens. You can make plain tomato sauce if you want, but this is a great time to jazz it up by adding seasonings such as garlic, oregano, rosemary, etc. Think spaghetti, pizza, taco sauce, etc.

Whole, Crushed or Diced

Blanch your tomatoes for just a couple of seconds – that is, dip them in boiling water for 10 seconds then toss them into an ice bath. An old Italian guy (because nobody knew more about tomatoes than this guy) taught me that if you slice a small ‘x’ somewhere on the bottom of the tomato, it makes it easier to peel. The skin will fall right off and you can proceed to the next step.

Once you get the skins off, cut away any bad parts or green sections. If you’re canning them whole, stuff them into the jars. If you’re halving, quartering, dicing, or crushing them first, do it now. And add them to the jars and top with water so that you leave 1/2 inch headroom, at least. Add lemon juice and salt, seal, and can.

Pickle Your Tomatoes

This isn’t a method that you’ll often see used for tomatoes but I think they’re delicious, and it’s crazy simple.

They’re delicious in salads or to chop up for salsa or chutney. I recommend using pint jars, and cherry tomatoes are the tomatoes of choice for this.

First, clean your tomatoes and remove the stem and leaves. Run each tomato through with a skewer so that the pickling can penetrate them.

Stuff the tomatoes into pint jars and add a sprinkling of fresh herbs (dried will work, too) of your choice in on top. I prefer basil and oregano. Feel free to add onions, a few cloves of garlic, or any other spice or vegetable that you like.

Though I prefer to keep it more Mediterranean flavored with the ripe tomatoes, pickled green tomatoes taste wonderful and make great gifts. Here are a few ideas for pickling spices for green tomatoes.

Basic Pickling Spice

- 2 tsp yellow mustard seeds
- 2 tsp celery seeds
- 2 tsp coriander seeds
- 1 tsp black peppercorns
- 1 tsp whole allspice

Garlic Dill Pickling Spice

- 1 tbsp. dill seeds
- 2 tsp black peppercorns
- 2 bay leaves, crumbled
- 8 cloves garlic, peeled

Spicy Pickling Spice

- 1 tbsp. black peppercorns
- 2 tsp brown mustard seeds
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- 2 tsp red pepper flakes

Combine these spices and divide them among the jars evenly, either before or after you add the tomatoes.



Next, combine the following ingredients in a pan and bring to a boil. Note that this is enough for about 3-4 pints so double or halve as necessary:

- 5 cups apple cider vinegar
- 5 cups filtered water
- 1 tbsp. salt

Pour the pickling juice over the tomatoes, leaving a half-inch or so of headspace after you've gotten all the bubbles out – use a small spatula or spoon to do that. Add rings and properly prepared seals, then process in a water bath for 15 min. Store in a cool place.

Make Tomato Powder

Tomato powder is absolutely delicious and stores fabulously so this is a great way to preserve tomatoes. Just add a couple of tablespoons to whatever you're making (adjust the amount according to taste).

You have a couple of options; you can either make them from whole, dehydrated tomatoes, or you can dehydrate the skins that you've removed while canning and make the powder from them.

When I'm making tomato powder, I prefer to dry my tomatoes (or peels) until they're nearly completely dry instead of just leathery, but either way will work. After you dry them, freeze the dehydrated tomatoes for a day, then remove them and put them in your blender or food processor and pulse until you have a powder.

Since the tomato powder tends to clump, you may want to add a teaspoon of arrowroot powder or corn starch per every few cups of dried tomatoes.

I recommend dry canning or vacuum sealing the tomato powder if you're not going to use it quickly.

As you can see, there's a lot that goes into growing tomatoes, but there are so many different ways that you can use them that it barely qualifies as work. It's like growing an entire winter's worth of possibilities all with just a few plants.

Study what kind of tomatoes you want to grow and get started! What are some of your favorite tomatoes? Do you have a recipe or an idea you'd like to share? If so, please do so in the comments section below.

Happy Gardening!

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