

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

From Seed to Harvest: A beginner's guide to growing tomatoes

Tomatoes are one of the most common plants grown in the garden, but they are usually grown from transplants bought at the store and not seeds. However, growing a tomato from seed allows for more options when it comes to the type of tomatoes a gardener wants to grow. Tomatoes range from typical red to yellow to seedless and heirloom varieties. Homegrown tomatoes taste delicious fresh, or they can be used for canning, sauces and other recipes.

To plant:

Tomatoes can be planted indoors six to eight weeks before the last frost date. Plant them ¼ inch deep in a seed-starting soil and keep them near a heat source until sprouts appear. Once sprouted, move to a window that receives full light. To get an earlier start outdoors, plant the tomato seeds in cold frames or raised beds.

To grow:

Transplant tomato seedlings outdoors two to three weeks after the last frost date. To encourage a strong plant, bury at least two-thirds of the stem when planting. Tomatoes like full sun and plenty of water, at least 1 inch per week. Always water the base of the plant and not the leaves. Tomato plants do best in a crumbly, loamy soil with a pH of 6.2 to 6.8. To retain moisture and deter weeds, add 2 to 4 inches of mulch around the tomato plants. Tomato plants need to be staked, so use a stake, cage or trellis when you first transplant the seedlings so not to damage the plants later on.

Sometimes, tomato plants can fall victim to the tomato hornworm, which is a big, green caterpillar that eats the leaves and can



[Betty Tomato seeds available at ufseeds.com](http://ufseeds.com)

damage the fruit of the plant. Be sure to rid plants of hornworms or use insecticides to protect the garden. Tomatoes also grow well in pots.

To harvest:

Tomatoes are ripe when they have reached the right color – red for red tomatoes, yellow for yellow tomatoes and so on – and are slightly soft when squeezed. This is usually 65 to 80 days after planting. The color should be even across the entire tomato, but green tomatoes can be harvested and used to make fried green tomatoes. Tomatoes ripen from the inside out, so if the outside looks ripe that means the inside is as well.

To harvest, grasp the tomato firmly but gently and twist it off the vine. If you are concerned about harming the plant, garden prunes or a knife can be used to cut the stem close to the fruit. Tomatoes should be stored at room temperature until used.



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What tomatoes crave:

When seedlings are still inside and once they form their first set of true leaves, you can apply quarter-strength water-soluble fertilizer. As you prepare the holes for the tomato transplants in the garden, mix a continuous-release fertilizer enriched with calcium into the soil. Also mix in 3 to 4 inches of compost prior to planting. Once plants are established and the first fruits begin to appear, fertilize regularly using a 5-10-5 fertilizer once or twice a month. Be careful to not use too much nitrogen, as this can cause leafy plants with little fruit.



[Sun Sugar Tomato seeds available at ufseeds.com](http://ufseeds.com)

Where to buy tomato seeds:

Urban Farmer sells countless options of tomatoes on our website at [ufseeds.com!](http://ufseeds.com)



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