

HOW TO... GROW TOMATOES



How to grow tomatoes

Homegrown tomatoes are so much tastier than shop bought. They are easy to grow... but they do need lots of sun, food and water. If they get this, you'll get lots of tomatoes.

How much sun?

Tomatoes need lots of sun, ideally six hours plus a day (that's half a day or more). In less, it's difficult to get them to grow and ripen. Grow cherry tomatoes as these ripen more easily.

What size of container?

The minimum is ten litres but twenty litres is better for most varieties. Tomatoes grown in bigger containers are easier to look after. (A container with a water reservoir is ideal if you have one).

How to water

Tomatoes are thirsty - particularly when full grown and fruiting. In warm weather they will need watering at least once a day. Check by putting your finger one inch into the soil - it should feel damp, not dry or wet.

How to feed

Tomatoes are hungry and must be fed to yield well. Once they start flowering, feed them with liquid tomato feed (get this from a garden shop, or pound store) once a week. Some people feed them a more dilute feed, more frequently (2 or 3 times a week).

What type of tomato?

There are two main types:

1. *Vine tomatoes* are grown on one main stem, and will often grow four to eight feet tall. A good choice for vertical gardening! You must pinch out the side shoots. Good varieties for containers include: Black Cherry, Gardeners Delight, and Sungold.
2. *Bush tomatoes* are left to grow as a bush, the side shoots do not need to be removed. Some bush tomatoes are small and compact (perfect for hanging baskets) others are big and only suitable for larger containers. Good hanging basket varieties include: Cherry Cascade, Hundreds and Thousands, and Tumbler.



Cherry tomatoes ripen more easily



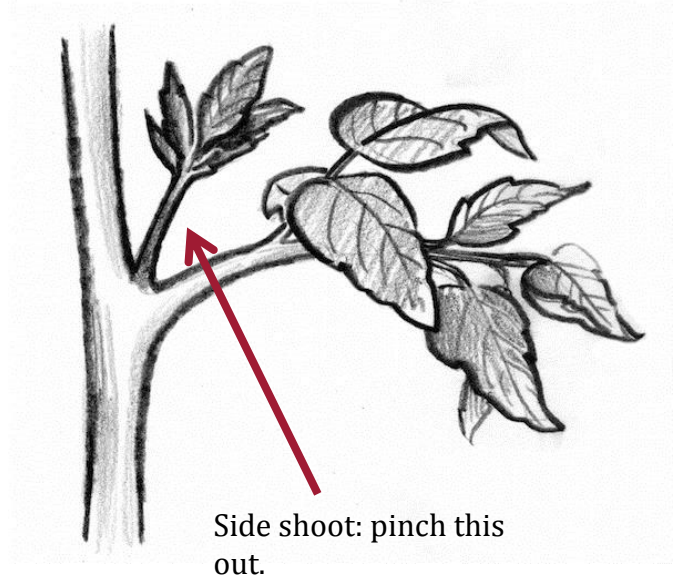
Vine tomatoes on strings



Bush tomato: Cherry Cascade

Pinching out

Vining tomatoes are grown on just one (sometimes two) main stems. To achieve this you must “pinch out” (ie pick off or cut off) the side shoots. Side shoots emerge between the main stem and each leaf. If they are not removed, the tomato will grow into a wild and unruly bush!



Tying up

Vine tomatoes need support or they will fall over. You can do this with a cane in the pot (make sure it is secure - tie it to e.g. a railing or the side of the pot if you can), tying the main stem of tomato onto the cane (tie the string tightly round the cane, loosely round the tomato).

Alternatively, you can support a tomato on a string: attach a string above the tomato (eg to a hook on the wall), then tie the bottom of the string loosely around the stalk at the base of the tomato. Then wind the string round the tomato as it grows.

Harvesting:

Pick tomatoes as soon as they are ripe. Picking encourages the tomato to produce more.

Seed saving

Tomatoes are one of the easiest crops to save seeds from. This is because they are self pollinating and therefore do not cross with other varieties.

Pests and diseases

The most common and damaging disease for tomatoes is blight. This turns the stems and fruits black, killing the tomato. The fungus is spread by water, so worst in wet weather in late summer. Try to avoid watering the leaves of your tomato.

More Tips for growing healthy tomatoes

- Because all tomato varieties are different, growing the same variety each year will help you learn how to grow that variety.
- For extra strong, healthy plants, spray the leaves of your tomato with liquid seaweed fertilizer once a week or fortnight (available from gardening stores and on the internet). Some gardeners also spray them once a week with Epsom salts (contains magnesium).
- Although tomatoes can be grown in old compost (add fertilizer like blood fish and bone), it is easier to grow them in new compost. Use your old compost for other crops like salads.



Tomato supported by string

Not enough sun is the most common cause of disappointing tomatoes. Check you have enough.