

Tomato Tips

1. Choose a bright, airy spot.

Plant tomatoes where they will get at least 10 hours of light in summer. And leave room between plants for air to circulate.

2. Rotate even a little.

Alternate your tomato bed between even just two spots and you diminish the risk of soilborne diseases such as bacterial spot and early blight.

3. Pass up overgrown transplants.

When buying tomato seedlings, beware of lush green starts with poor root systems. They will languish for weeks before growing.

4. Bury the stems.

Plant your tomato seedlings up to the first true leaves. New roots will quickly sprout on the stems. More roots means more fruits.

5. Water deeply but infrequently.

Soak your tomato bed once a week, or every five days at the height of summer. Water directly on the soil, not on the leaves.

6. Pinch the suckers.

Prune off these non-fruiting branches. This directs the tomato plant's energy into growing bigger, better fruit.

7. Stake them high.

Use 6-foot stakes for indeterminate varieties like the 'Brandywine' tomato. Put in the stakes when transplanting to avoid damaging roots.

8. Add compost and trim.

While the first fruit is ripening, encourage new growth and continued fruit set by scratching compost around the stem, and trim some of the upper leaves.

9. Plant again.

Three weeks after you plant tomatoes in your garden, put in another set so all of your harvest doesn't come at once.

10. Pick ripe, but not dead ripe.

Heirloom tomatoes that are too ripe can be mealy. Harvest them when they're full size and fully colored.