Growing Great Tomatoes

Heirloom vs. Hybrid

*Heirlooms* are older varieties. The seeds can be saved and will grow the identical plant next year. They are more susceptible to diseases. *Hybrids* are a cross between two distinctly different parents. The seeds cannot be saved. Most have higher disease resistance.

Indeterminate vs. Determinate

*Indeterminate* varieties continue growing all summer and require more space producing a large vine. *(Semi) Determinate* varieties grow on a compact vines requiring less space in the garden. They are good selections for containers.

Tomato Gardening Tips

- Tomatoes need full sun—8 or more hours per day is best, 6 hours minimum
- Don’t plant too early! Soil must be 55°F at a depth of 4 inches. Mid-May is a good time.
- Tomatoes need good drainage. In heavy clay soil, create a raised bed.
- Remove all leaves below the first set of flowers to help prevent soil-borne leaf diseases. As the plant matures, remove leaves from the bottom 12–18 inches of the plant.
- Drip irrigation or bottom watering will help prevent disease. Avoid overhead watering to reduce diseases.
- Consistent watering at regular intervals helps prevent fruit cracking and blossom end rot.
- Use mulch to retain water, reduce soil temperatures and prevent soil-borne disease.
- Use stakes, cages, or trellises to provide support and keep the fruit off the ground.
- Tomatoes will stop producing fruit when temperatures drop below 50°F or rise above 90°F. When conditions improve, plants generally recover and will set fruit again.

Fertilizer—For best results, get a soil test to determine the fertility of your soil, and follow the recommendations of the test results. If you have not done a soil test:

For *In-ground planting* – Prior to planting, apply ½ cup of balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 to each 3 ft², or 1 lb./100 ft² of garden area and work into the soil. During the growing season, apply 2 tablespoons of the same fertilizer, per plant when the first fruit sets. Repeat every four weeks throughout the season.

For *container planting* – Use a water soluble fertilizer and follow the package directions.

Harvest and Storage

- Fruit harvested at the immature green stage has significant loss of flavor.
- Fruit at the “breaker” stage with a pale, radiating star shape on the bottom will retain most of its flavor.
- Blushing fruit, which is turning from green to pale orange/red, can be harvested with very little loss of flavor.
- Always ripen fruit above 55°F (such as on the kitchen counter).
- Fruit stored above 55°F will keep its full flavor.
- Fruit stored below 55°F (in the refrigerator) will lose flavor.
Grafted Tomatoes – Two different varieties are spliced together—a vigorous rootstock and a high-producing variety.

- Benefits
  - Helps with soil-borne disease prevention especially for heirloom varieties
  - Increased yields up to 40%

Disease Resistance – This code indicates resistance to common disease or pest problems

- V – Verticillum Wilt
- F – Fusarium Wilt
- N – Nematodes
- TMV – Tobacco Mosaic Virus
- EB – Early Blight

Common fruit size

- Grape – smallest round or pear-shaped, about 1” in diameter
- Cherry – bigger than grape tomatoes, 1-2” in diameter
- Roma – Pear or plum-shaped fruit, usually used for sauce
- Beefsteak – large, round or odd-shaped, up to 1 lb.

New varieties with good flavor recently tested by K-State Research and Extension

(Semi) Determinate Hybrids:

- Biltmore
- Amelia or Crista (girl series)
- Scarlet Red
- BHN 961 (red)
- BHN 871 (yellow)

Indeterminate Hybrids:

- Jetstar
- Big Beef
- Pink Beauty
- Martha Washington

Cherry:

- Sungold
- Sunsugar

Heirloom:

- Arkansas Traveler
- Pineapple
- Orange Oxheart
- German Johnson
- Green Zebra
- Aunt Ruby’s German Green
- Brandywine series
- Pruden’s Purple
- Cherokee Purple

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