

2009 City of Colwood GO LOCAL TOMATO CHALLENGE



Top Tips for Terrific Tomatoes from Carolyn Herriot www.earthfuture.com/gardenpath

"Which is the best tomato to grow?" There's no 'best' tomato in such a world of diversity. Tomatoes come in every colour – red, pink, orange, black, purple, yellow, and even striped. They come in all sizes from tiny currants to bite-sized cherries to whopping beefsteaks, in every shape from round to pear to oval, and in all flavours from sweet to tart, to smoky to fruity. They can be grown for any purpose – fresh eating from the vine, tossing into salads, drying, roasting, juicing, or using in sauces and soups. Get adventurous with tomatoes and open up to a new world of culinary delight.

By growing open-pollinated rather than hybrid tomatoes, you can save seeds of those that perform well in your garden, those with the best flavour and highest yields. Heritage varieties have not been hybridized between two parent strains.

A slightly acidic soil pH of 6 is ideal. Prepare the planting hole with compost and a handful of organic fertilizer with a balanced NPK around 6-8-6. Add a handful of dolomite lime as calcium prevents blossom end rot. A teaspoon of Epsom salts, magnesium sulphate, prevents magnesium deficiency and yellowing of the leaves. TIP: Tomatoes love fish heads planted underneath them, if you can get your hands on some.

Make sure the ground has warmed up before transplanting outdoors. Black landscape fabric over beds warms the soil by day and holds in warmth at night. You can also use cloches or bell jars to cover newly transplanted tomato plants.

New roots develop on all parts of the stem planted underground. More roots provide the tomato with more nutrients, which means higher yields. Strip all the leaves off the stem except for the top truss of three or four leaves when transplanting. Either dig a deep hole or lay the tomato plant diagonally in a shallow trench, but bury most of the stem except for the upper truss of leaves to encourage the formation of these roots.

Suckers are sprouts that grow between the main stem and the leaf axils. Removing suckers directs the plant's energy from vine production to fruit production. Remove suckers from indeterminate, vining plants diligently, and train them to one or two main stems. Beware of removing suckers from determinate, bushy plants, which will cut back on tomato production.

Provide support for tomato plants when first transplanting; cages work for bushy determinate varieties, sturdy five-foot cedar stakes for vining indeterminate varieties. Proper staking and tying as the tomato grows exposes leaves to sunlight and results in increased fruit production. TIP: Pantyhose makes the best ties for tomato plants, as it does not cut into the soft stems. Cut pantyhose into stretchy strips, and use these for tying plants to stakes in the garden.

Don't over water; a deep soaking once a week is better than several light waterings. Erratic watering causes fruit splitting and blossom end rot. Fertilizing plants with liquid seaweed, with a high phosphorus content, boosts fruit production.

Tomato blight, *Phytophthora infestans* is the most serious disease of tomatoes, especially after long periods of wet weather in August and September. It first appears as blotches on the leaves and then blackened stems. To control blight, remove all infected plant debris from the garden and do not compost. Once blight shows up in your garden, practice crop rotation diligently in future years to prevent reoccurrence.