

Tomatoes are a favorite of many a gardener; even those that do not have an in-ground garden. Since tomatoes love warmth, they grow very well in containers. Be sure to provide support for your plant. The weight of the tomatoes can break the branches, and wind can break the entire plant. Cherry or other small-fruited bush varieties may be touted as not requiring support, but...I would support them anyway! Tomato plants are NOT frost hardy, even a light frost can kill your plant. Cold weather (even a cool night), when the tomato plant is young can cause leaf-tips to brown, and growth to be interrupted as the plant recovers.

Tomato seeds require quite warm soil temperatures (27°C) to germinate well. For this reason, they are usually germinated in a controlled environment (heated flats, on top of your fridge, etc) and then transplanted to the garden. The 'days-to-maturity' quoted on the seed packet is typically the average time required to reach maturity from transplant date (not seeding or germination date). This can vary considerably depending on weather conditions, soil nutrient levels, and the variety being planted. Container gardeners are better able to moderate the effects of weather on their plants.

If you are germinating your own seeds, be sure you have proper lights to grow the seedlings once they emerge and, before you are able to transplant outdoors. Use of a grow light is beneficial since the amount of sunlight on a windowsill generally is not sufficient; and you will end up with tall, weak plants. Putting your seedlings outdoors in a small greenhouse during warm days, and back indoors during the night is a viable option. So is heating the greenhouse during cool periods.

Tomatoes prefer an acidic soil (pH 5-6) so adding compost or aged manure to your soil is beneficial. Transplant the young plants outdoors after danger of frost has passed. Remove any 'suckers' from your plant before planting. Bury much of the stem of your young plant in the soil. The stem will grow roots. Some gardeners even plant the young plant horizontally, leaving only the top few inches above ground level. If your soil is shallow, this is a technique to consider. Tomatillo is also transplanted in this manner. Tomatillo is ready to harvest when the husk begins to dry out and turn brown. Be sure to plant at least two tomatillo plants for proper pollination. This is the case for many vegetable/fruit varieties.

Continuing to prune away any suckers and a few of the really large leaves from the base of your tomato plant will encourage larger fruits. Fertilizing is important too, especially if you are growing your plant in a container. The plant will utilize the nutrients in the soil in your container, and it needs to be replenished at *least* every two weeks when the plant is growing and producing fruit. If using a commercial fertilizer, always follow the directions on the packaging; too much can do more harm than good! A water soluble 18-18-21 is very convenient to use. If you choose a granular fertilizer (5-8-10 to 6-12-12) be sure to side dress only; do not allow the fertilizer granules to be in direct contact with the stem. Adding a granular fertilizer to the bottom of your hole when transplanting is quick and easy. Avoid using a high nitrogen fertilizer on tomatoes. Abundant soil phosphorus is important for high yields. Excess nitrogen causes rampant plant growth and soft, late-ripening fruits.

Peppers and Eggplant are grown much the same as tomatoes. These too are warmth-loving plants and do well in large containers. Both are NOT at all frost hardy. Do not bury the stems when transplanting however. Be sure to support these plants as well, since the fruits are large and heavy. 'Small pepper' varieties such as mini bells, jalapeno, habanero etc. *may* not require support. NEVER allow your pepper plant to, *at any time*, experience temperatures below about 13°C; the plant may look fine, but you will pay with a reduced harvest.

Peppers start out green and turn colour as they mature. The green pepper you purchase at a grocery store is almost always an immature red pepper.

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