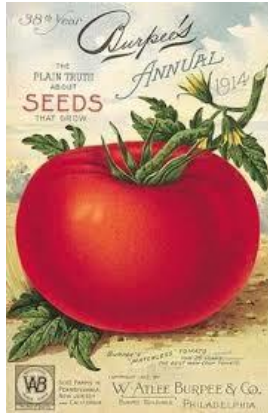


# Tomato

(*Lycopersicon lycopersicum* – Nightshade family)



## **Seed Starting/Propagation:**

In order for tomatoes to ripen before the frost sets in, it is important to either start your own seeds or purchase the plant from a nursery. Tomato seeds should be started 6-8 weeks before the last frost date (or earlier if desire for larger plants). Make sure to move your growing plant to a larger container if needs be.

As your seeds grow into plants run your hands lightly over them to simulate wind so they will grow strong roots.

## **Care:**

- Harden off 7 - 10 days before transplanting by placing on the back porch or outside somewhere during the day and bring back in at night.
- Do not transplant outdoors until the night temps remain above 50 degrees.
- Tomatoes like the heat so plant in full sun. Square foot gardening is one plant per square for vine and one per 9 square feet for bush, otherwise plant 2 -3 feet apart.
- Tomatoes like to be planted deep, usually covering your first couple leaves. After digging the hole I put in about a 1/2 cup of crushed egg shells because tomatoes like lots of calcium. Cover the plant with either the potting soil mixture or compost.
- Water deeply and regularly, keeping the water off the leaves if possible. Once the plant is established you want about 1" of water once or twice a week. Stop watering all together once you have fruit on the plant.
- Mulch, but wait until after the ground has warmed, you want to have about a 3" space from the stem so the stem doesn't rot and I have also noticed more pest problems when the mulch is right against the stem
- Support the plants right after planting with either tomato cages or stakes.

**TIPS:**

- Remove bottom leaves up to 1 foot once the plant reaches about 3 feet.
- Pinch off and remove suckers that form between the joint of two branches and prune any yellowed or dead leaves
- Tomatoes need lots of feeding so plant them in rich compost and give them a little compost tea every two weeks or so until July, at which time you no longer need to feed them.
- Make sure to rotate your tomatoes every year and according to Heirloom Life Gardener, they shouldn't be in the same spot within a four year period.
- I love to compost just about everything but tomatoes are a no, no in the compost pile unless you are looking to spread disease so make sure to throw the tomato plants out after harvesting.

**Companions:**

- Do not plant next to apricot trees, the cabbage family, potatoes, corn or fennel.
- Companion plant with parsley, basil, garlic, chives, onions, marigold, carrot and borage.

**Harvesting/Preserving:**

- Tomatoes are ready for harvesting when they have reached their final color and become soft.
- Gently twist and pull so the stems do not break or you can cut them off.
- Tomatoes can be bottled whole or crushed, dried, powdered or bottled into a variety of items such as pasta sauce, salsa, soups, chili, tomato juice.

**Seed Saving:**

- Allow the fruit to fully ripen.
- Cut in half and squish the seeds and pulp into a jar, cover with cheesecloth.
- Wait a couple days for the mixture to ferment, it will form a white film on top.
- Once the white film appears, rinse the entire mixture over and over until the seeds are clean and separated from the pulp.
- Strain the seeds out and spread onto a flat surface, pat dry with a clean cloth and set aside to dry in a place where there is plenty of air circulation and no humidity.
- Once completely dry, store in an airtight container for use next year.