

growing GUIDE

TOMATOES

Tomatoes can be planted in beds or containers. They need full sun and excellent drainage because they use a lot of water. It's also important to make sure the soil has plenty of organic nutrients and has a neutral ph.

VARIETIES

There are determinate, indeterminate, and cherry/grape varieties. Determinate are bush types that grow to a certain height. These typically produce a larger, but shorter harvest. Indeterminate are vining tomatoes that continue to grow all season. This type produces small, but longer harvest. Cherry/Grape produce smaller fruits and are great for container gardens.

FERTILIZING

Tomato plants should be fertilized at the time of planting and side-dressed once they are 1/3 of the way grown and then again 2 weeks after the first harvest. Mix the fertilizer into the soil but avoid the foliage of the plant.

The most important nutrient to look for in a tomato fertilizer is calcium.

PLANTING

Tomato plants can be planted in the ground when the soil temperature rises to above 60 degrees and have been cleared of freezing.

In Kansas City, this is usually in mid-May. If you are planting in beds, keep rows at least 4-5 ft. apart and plants within rows at least 2-3 ft. apart. Be sure to check the expected mature size of the variety you choose to allow plenty of room. When tomato plants are too crowded, they don't get enough air circulation, leaving them more vulnerable to diseases and infections.

When planting, bury the stems of the plant up to where the first set of leaves start. Their stems will produce new roots that will help strengthen the plant. Remember to use a cage or stake. Stake a few inches from the stem and tie loosely. It's a good idea to place straw in the rows to combat weeds, control moisture, and moderate the soil temperatures.

INSECTS & DISEASES

A common pest to tomatoes is aphids. Aphids are small green insects that coat the stems and undersides of leaves. They will often cause leaves to turn yellow and curl. Also tomato hornworms will put holes in the leaves. Insecticidal soaps may help control them.

A serious disorder is blossom end rot which causes the bottom of the tomato to turn black and rot. This is commonly caused by a calcium imbalance. Sprays such as Rot Stop can help.

HARVESTING

Plants will begin to set fruit when night temperatures are between 55-75 degrees.

Pick tomatoes when they are ripened on the vine but still plenty firm. Some say it is best to pick right as they are beginning to ripen as they will continue to ripen off the vine.

Store tomatoes at room temperature and do not refrigerate.

