



Fall Tomato Gardening: FAQ

Q. When should I plant my fall tomatoes?

A. Plant seeds indoors from May 1 to May 31. Plant transplants from July 15 to August 31.

The ideal time you plant depends on where you live. You should wait for the later dates if you live in cooler areas (i.e. The Woodlands). You can plant during the earlier dates if you live in a warmer part of Harris County (i.e. The Heights).

Q. Do tomatoes need full sun?

A. Yes. Tomatoes need a minimum of 6 hours of direct sun per day to stay healthy and productive.

Q. What is the difference between “determinate” and “indeterminate” tomato varieties?

A. Determinate (or bush) tomatoes grow to a specific size, usually 3-4 feet. All the fruit on determinate varieties are ready to be harvested around the same time.

Indeterminate varieties keep growing until they are pulled up or until frost. They can grow from 6-12 feet tall so they need strong support. The fruit on indeterminate varieties produce and ripen over the season.

Q. What does it mean when the label says, “135 days”?

A. That’s the “days-to-maturity”. It means the number of days from transplanting the seedlings into the garden until the first appearance of fruit. That said, these are only general guidelines. All kinds of cultural factors will impact the actual number of days to maturity. Ambient temperature is the biggest influence. Warm evening temperatures above 70 to 75 degrees and very hot daytime temperatures above 85 to 90 degrees can prevent pollination of plant flowers.

Q. What is the difference between “heirloom” and “hybrid” tomatoes?

A. Hybrid tomatoes are cross bred from two or more different plants for a particular purpose (disease resistance, color, shape, etc.). The seeds from the tomatoes you grow will not produce tomatoes with the same characteristics as the original seeds.

Heirlooms are open-pollinated and the seeds have been handed down through generation of growers. The varieties are at least 50 years old. They are valued for their taste, unusual markings, color and shape. The tomatoes you grow from saved seed will replicate the original plant.

Q. What does “disease resistance” mean?

A. The ability of a plant to withstand fungal, viral and bacterial diseases is called disease resistance. Common disease resistances are to verticillium wilt (V), fusarium wilt (F), and nematode (N).