

BUCHANAN'S

NATIVE PLANTS

Spring Tomato Gardening: FAQ

Q. When should I plant my spring tomatoes?

A. Plant seeds indoors from December 15th to January 15th. Plant transplants from February 15th to March 31st.

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. Can I transplant tomatoes in 4" pots directly into the ground?

A. In late winter, the threat of cold damage for young tomatoes is too great for them to go directly into the ground. Young transplants should be moved into a one gallon pot to allow the roots to develop. 1 gallon and larger tomatoes can be put in the ground February 15th.

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, **HOWEVER** your young tomatoes should be protected from the cold. Tomato seedlings need a fairly steady growing temperature between 58F and 60F.

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 succumb to the summer heat. 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, "65 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 the 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 generations of growers. The varieties are at least 50 years old. They are valued for their taste, unusual markings, color, size, 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).

Q. Do I need to fertilize? What do I fertilize with?

A. Yes! All plants benefit from a regular fertilizing schedule. You can use a granule fertilizer like **MicroLife 6-2-4** or **Happy Frog Tomato and Vegetable 7-4-5** or a gentle liquid like **Lady Bug John’s Recipe 3-1.5-2** for healthy growth. Use **MicroLife Maximum Blooms 3-8-3** or another high-phosphorus liquid fertilizer to promote blooming and fruit set. If you suspect your soil is lacking in key nutrients and causing a condition such as blossom end rot, contact the Texas Agricultural Extension for a soil analysis.