



Your Guide to Growing TOMATOES & PEPPERS

TOMATOES & PEPPERS

Tomatoes and peppers steal the crown as some of our all-time favorite veggies to grow during the spring season. There are just so many kinds to pick from with a range of flavors and growing styles, how do we decipher these delectable delicacies? Let's dig into the best varieties, growing methods, and season-long care tips of these famed favorites.

PLANNING

Varieties: There are three main types of tomatoes and peppers: heirloom, hybrid, and GMO. We do not sell GMOs. Hybrids are safe to grow, and eat, as they are selectively bred for specific traits. Heirlooms are seeds saved from the best plants for flavor or color. Tomatoes are categorized by color and size, such as cherry, pear, saucing, small slicer, and large slicing. Peppers are divided into hot and sweet types, and further classified into subgroups.

Placement: Tomatoes require full sun, while cherry tomatoes can tolerate partial shade. Peppers thrive in full sun, except for smaller sweet varieties.

Space requirements: The needed space depends on the variety. Provide airflow between plants at maturity. Bush plants require a minimum of 3-4 sq ft, while vining varieties can be trained upwards to save space.

Seed vs. Transplant: If planting by seed, start indoors 4-6 weeks before the last frost date. Transplants allow for trying new varieties without committing to a full packet or growing from seed.

Determinate vs. Indeterminate:

- Determinate tomatoes are bush tomatoes with a limited size and harvest cycle.
- Indeterminate tomatoes are vining and continue growing throughout the season. Peppers do not fall into these categories.

GARDEN PREP

Container vs. Raised Bed: Tomatoes can be grown in the ground, containers, or in raised beds. Bush varieties are recommended for containers and raised beds, while vining tomatoes can be challenging to support in containers. Peppers also do well in containers or raised beds.

Bed Preparation: Incorporate compost into well-draining soil. For raised beds, add 1-2 inches of compost into the top 6 inches. Rotate compost types yearly to replenish micronutrients.

Soil pH: Tomatoes and peppers prefer a pH of 5.5-6.5. Adjust soil pH using limestone or garden sulfur. We offer complimentary soil testing.

Soil Amendments:

- Perlite reduces soil compaction and increases air retention, suitable for clay-based soils
- Vermiculite retains moisture and helps maintain soil structure, ideal for raised beds and seedling trays.

Compost: Use a variety of compost materials. Incorporate into the soil, or use as mulch during planting season.

Hardiness Zones: Tomatoes and peppers are sensitive to temperatures below 40°F. Plant after the last frost date, usually in mid-April in the Hampton Roads area.

Setting transplants: Use Bio-tone Starter Plus from Espoma, a starter plant food with beneficial soil microbes, to promote healthy growth.

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PLANT SUPPORT

Cages: Choose the right size cage for the mature plant. Ultomato systems are great for larger plants.

GROWING

Watering: Provide regular watering, avoiding overhead watering whenever possible. Soaker hoses are a great option.

Plant Food: Apply plant food as needed based on plant requirements. Garden Tone and Tomato Tone from Espoma are great choices.

Weeds: Mulch to reduce weeds and apply herbicide granules to control weed presence.

Fungus and Blights: Inspect plants regularly for fungal diseases. Plant resistant varieties and practice crop rotation every 4 years. Maintain airflow and avoid overhead watering.

Insects and Pests: Treat stink bugs with specific products. Tomato hornworms can be controlled with Permethrin/Bifenthrin or Spinosad products. Avoid treating hornworms with rice-like parasites on their bodies, as they will naturally expire.

2023 FAVORITE VARIETIES

Peppers:

- California Wonder
- Big Bertha
- Corno del Toro
- Nikita
- Purple Beauty
- Shishito

Tomatoes:

- Midnight Cherry
- Indigo Rose
- Celebrity
- Cherokee Carbon

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