

The Great Tomato Race is On! - Don Kinzler

Home gardeners who love tomatoes usually want two things: a main season crop for fresh eating, canning and processing, plus a few very early tomatoes to get our first taste following a long winter.



Ways to speed and increase tomato production:

1. Choose a suitable variety.

Tomato varieties are divided into 2 main classes

Determinate varieties grow to a certain plant size, then ripen fruit in concentrated time

Indeterminate varieties produce vines all season, harvest is less consolidated.

The number of days from transplanting into the garden until fruiting

Early varieties are 50 to 65 days

Mid-season, main crop varieties are 66 to 78 days

Late varieties are 80 to 110 days.

Some favorites: Early Girl (58), Lark (60), Whopper (65), Better Bush (68), Beefy Boy (70), Dakota Gold (70), Mountain Spring (70), Sheyenne (70), Super Fantastic (70), Celebrity (72) Cannonball (75), Big Beef (73), Beefsteak and many heirlooms (80 - 100) days.

2. Normal "safe" date for transplanting outdoors is May 15 to 25.

For risk-takers, to get early tomatoes, plant in late April and protect with plastic jugs, etc.

3. Tomatoes are a warm-season crop. Hasten growth by encouraging soil and air to warm up quicker.

A. Locate a plant or two in the warm microclimate of your home's sunny south side.

B. Use clear plastic "mulch" to heat the soil. Can be done several weeks before planting.

4. When buying tomato plants, choose vigorous plants with fresh green color. Yellowed leaves

Indicate the plant is nutrition-starved and will take longer to establish and grow.

5. "Harden Off" plants by placing them outdoors 5 to 10 days before planting.

6. Plant deeply, by burying plants right up to their "ears". Roots form along buried stem.

7. Protect from cutworms with a loose collar of plastic or metal two inches above and below soil.

8. Apply a water soluble fertilizer solution after planting.

Fertilize throughout the season with moderation. Fruit and plant size will increase, but fruiting may be delayed. Never use high-nitrogen lawn fertilizer on tomatoes.

9. Early blossoms often drop without setting fruit, when night temps drop below 50-55 degrees.

A naturally occurring plant hormone is sold called "Blossom Set" which aids early fruit set.

10. Pruning of tomatoes. Indeterminate types should have terminal growth pinched at least by early

August to prevent excess plant growth at the expense of fruiting.

11. What's an heirloom variety? Types developed before hybrids, previous to World War II

12. Grafted Tomatoes

Relatively new to the United States

Special vigorous rootstock varieties are used to transmit vigor and disease resistance to varieties lacking these qualities, such as some heirloom types.

The graft must be kept above soil level to prevent top variety from rooting in.

Must be staked or caged, so no branches touch ground.

13. The race is on!

Thanks! Feel free to email me, Don Kinzler, address forumgrowingtogethr@hotmail.com

Check out my garden blog <http://growingtogether.areavoices.com/> and Friend me on Facebook.