

# Stake Tomatoes On These Methods

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Almost every gardener, from Martha Stewart to the fictional Don Corleone, has grown tomatoes. The trick to growing them effectively, according to a Penn State gardening specialist, is proper care and preparation.

Plant tomatoes by Memorial Day. If temperatures dip to frost levels after planting, cover the tomato plants with paper or cloth coverings. Plastic covers will cause freezing if the plastic touches the plant.

Here are some tomato growth tips:

- **Planting.** Tomato plants should be planted in early evening, to reduce stress and heat injury from the sun. Tomatoes need cool, moist conditions after transplanting. Set the plant into the ground up to the first set of leaves so the roots will be more stable.

- **Stakes or cages.** Stake or cage the plants as you are planting them. If you wait to stake the plant, you'll end up disturbing or breaking parts of the plant.

- **Water** immediately.

Gardeners should use a water-soluble starter solution fertilizer at half the recommended rate. He suggests using about a pint of liquid per plant for best results.

- **Fertilizers.** High-phosphorus fertilizer should be used. High phosphorus means the middle number on the formula is at least three to four times the other two numbers, such as 12-48-12 or 10-55-10.

- **More watering.** Tomato plants should be watered every week to 10 days, if it has not rained in that time. Gardeners should water so the soil is moist from six to 10 inches deep. Light spray sprinklers will take about an hour to soak the soil thoroughly. If you use a hose-end sprayer or rose-fan sprinkler, it will take about 10 to 15 minutes of watering. About the time you're running out of patience, that's when the plant has had enough water."

- **Tying.** Two weeks after planting, the stems should be tied to the stake with soft twine, strips of cloth or yarn.

- **Add nutrients.** Because

Pennsylvania has calcium-rich soils, gardeners should add magnesium to the soil. Tomatoes require high amounts of magnesium, which can be added by applying high-magnesium limestone, or the even more magnesium-rich dolomitic limestone.

The bottom leaves of the plant will turn yellow if it needs magnesium. When the plant is in a weakened state, Early Blight, a disease that attacks tomato plants, can develop and hurt the tomato crop.

- **Insect and disease control.** Gardeners can control pests in small gardens by breaking off leaves with evidence of disease of insects. Seal the affected leaves in plastic bags and throw them away. If conditions are too far gone, spray.

About 40 days after the flowering or 65 to 80 days after transplanting, the first tomatoes should appear. For the best flavor and aroma, gardeners

should wait for the tomato to reach full color before picking. The tomato should be slightly firm, not mushy.

Any tomato showing even a trace of color will ripen as long as they aren't refrigerated. How long it takes to ripen depends on size, variety and other factors.

The plants will continue to produce tomatoes until the first frost. If you know the frost is coming, go out and pick everything. Those showing color will ripen and the green ones can be fried, or cooked into relish.

The following tomato varieties are known for superior taste and aroma:

- **First Lady VFNTAs** (The VFNTAs means this variety is resistant to Verticillium, Fusarium Wilt, Nematodes,

Tobacco Mosaic Virus and Alternaria Stem Canker.)

- **Big Beef VFNTAsL** (The L means this variety is resistant to Gray Leaf Spot.)

- **Be'ter Boy VFN.**
- **Delicious.** A beefsteak type tomato with excellent flavor and aroma.

**Cherry Tomatoes:**

- **Super Sweet 100 VF**
- **Sun Gold F.** A yellow tomato variety.

Husky Gold VF is recommended for gardeners growing in small patches near patios or in containers. The tomato is yellow and averages about 2 inches in diameter. The plant is compact with a very sturdy central stalk, so it doesn't require staking.

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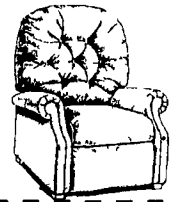
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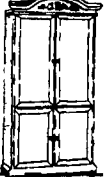
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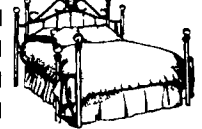
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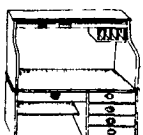


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