

Growing Tomatoes and Peppers

TOMATOES

Growing Conditions:

They require a location in full sun, warm weather (nights a constant 50F or higher), consistent watering, and the addition of a tomato fertilizer if grown in a pot or poor soil.

Indeterminate vs. Determinate:

There are two different types of tomatoes; **determinate and indeterminate**. Determinate types will only grow to a defined size, ideal for small garden spaces and containers. They produce all their fruit all at once and are excellent for making salsa or canning sauce. Indeterminate types will vine and requires a support system such as a tomato cage or trellis. Varieties include Big Boy and Early Girl. Fruit is produced throughout the harvest season.

Planting:

Tomatoes can be transplanted outdoors **after May 15**. Any sooner and the plant will be stressed due to cold soil and air temps. When planting, it's often advisable to set them deep into the soil so the majority of the stem is underground. You can also use the 'trench' technique by laying the root and part of the stem into a shallow trench and cover with soil. The stem will then grow roots and help support the plant. If you've had problems with Blossom End Rot in the past, add gypsum to your soil at this time.

Watering:

Provide consistent watering.

Before each watering, stick your finger and use a tool 2-3" below the soil surface. If it feels dry, water the plant until the ground is saturated but not soggy. Do not water if it's still wet.

Water only the soil, not the plant foliage as this may cause diseases to spread. Mulching will prevent disease spread from water splashing up from the soil.

Disease Prevention and Treatment:

The most common disease in our area is Blossom End Rot, a black mushy area at the bottom of the fruit. Mostly due to calcium deficiency, it can be treated by using Bonide Stop-Rot or Gypsum and fertilizers with calcium. If you are unsure about the health of your tomato, bring in a leaf or fruit sample and we can help diagnose the problem.

Harvesting:

Tomatoes may be harvested right when they show signs of color, even if it's light. After that point, you tomato will not acquire additional flavor. You can also wait until they are fully ripened to harvest.

PEPPERS

There are seemingly an infinite variety of colors, sizes, shapes, textures, and 'heats' or scoville level. Decide on your main uses for the pepper to help make your decision.

General planting and harvesting advice: Plant outdoors in the garden or a large patio pot after the chance of frost **after May 15th**. Peppers dislike cold weather and will not grow until nighttime temps moderate in late spring and early summer. Spacing requirements differ by variety but is generally 18"- 24" per plant. Peppers must have full sun, warm weather and adequate soil moisture (but not soggy) for optimum growth. Consider mulching around your plants to improve soil conditions and retain moisture.

Disease Prevention and Treatment:

Watch for aphids, mites, viruses and diseases throughout the summer. All these can lower yields or even kill the pepper plant. The most common disease is blossom end rot, which appears as a mushy brown spot at the bottom of the pepper. The addition of gypsum to the soil or application of Bonide Stop-Rot can help alleviate the problem. If in doubt, bring a sample of your plant in a bag for treatment advice.

Harvesting:

When harvesting peppers be sure to remove from plant with stem attached. This keeps the pepper plant from being damaged during storage

Other Interesting Pepper Facts: The ingredient in peppers that causes it to taste 'hot' is called Capsaicin. Sweet Bell peppers are devoid of this chemical while Habaneros have high amounts. Most of the Capsaicin is concentrated in the inner ribs and seeds and measured in parts per million (ppm).