

We're Here to Help!

Tomatoes are arguably the most popular vegetable garden plant. In addition to bearing fruit, they also produce tons of questions each season.

In an effort to help our tomato gardeners, this brochure offers a list of suggestions for growing tomatoes in our region.

Phelan's strives to provide only tomato varieties that produce well here. Come see us in spring for a wide selection of sizes and types of tomatoes for your garden.



Open Year-Round
7 days a week
4955 Austin Bluffs Parkway
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Let's Talk Tomatoes

Growing tips and avoiding common pitfalls



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Let's Talk Tomatoes

- Always **harden off greenhouse plants** for 7 to 10 days by placing them in a spot protected from the wind and sun several hours a day, gradually increasing the time exposed to sunlight, wind and nighttime temperatures.
- Choose your **sunniest, warmest spot**—up against a wall is great for heat retention when planting tomatoes.
- **Dig lots of composted organic material** into the soil.
- **Preheat the ground** with Walls o' Water or black plastic.
- Transplant at the right time!! Tomatoes will not grow well until the **nights are above 50 degrees**. (Our average last frost day is May 15th, but use common sense when planting tender crops.)
- When transplanting, **dig a shallow trench (rather than a deep hole)** and lay the plant on its side. Fill in the trench and bend the top upward, leaving just the top third or less of the plant above ground. The plant is better able to get water and nutrients with this method.
- **Water regularly** to keep the roots from drying out, but don't over water.
- Longer season tomato varieties tend to be meaty and large; early season are usually smaller and juicier.
- For **container-grown** tomato plants, choose a **determinate variety**. It will stay more compact, producing its fruit all at one time.
- Use **tomato cages or stakes** on indeterminate varieties to keep the fruit off the ground and help prevent rotting
- **Fertilize** your tomato plants with a

tomato fertilizer (low in nitrogen) at initial planting. Side-dress 3 weeks after transplant, before first harvest and again two weeks after first harvest.

- Always **rotate tomato plants in your garden** area from year to year to discourage disease and pests.
- **Extend your season** in the fall by covering plants with frost cloth. You may get up to another month of harvest if the plants weather the first cold snap.
- Prepare to **ripen green tomatoes** by running plants drier in September. Before the first frost, cut the vine at the base and hang it in the garage OR pick individual green tomatoes, place them in a paper sack inside your house and most will turn red.

Common Tomato Problems

You've followed the above tips...planted your tomato starts in a nice sunny area, supplemented them with water and fertilizer. If the weather remains warm and hail free, your vines should produce a bumper crop of red beauties 52-70 days from the time the blossom sets. Right?

We hope that this scenario will be true for you. After all, there is nothing like the taste of a home-grown, fresh-from-the-vine tomato. Unfortunately though, late summer can bring a few surprises.

Blossom End Rot

Very common. It appears as a sunken dark spot on the bottom of the fruit. Unlike diseases, it is not transmitted from plant to plant or even from fruit to fruit. In fact, this problem is completely caused by environmental factors. So, the good news is, you can prevent the problem.

Causes: If your tomato vine cannot take up water or calcium properly, the fruit begins to rot.

Contributing factors can include:

- allowing the plant to go too dry during active growth (keep moisture levels consistent especially during hot dry spells or when tomatoes are grown in containers where moisture can fluctuate a great deal)
- planting too early in cold soil (usually only the first fruits are affected)
- keeping the plant very wet (such as in clay soil) where root development and therefore H₂O and calcium uptake are inefficient
- Use of a fertilizer that is high in nitrogen can also contribute to this deformity.

A spray for blossom end rot with the active ingredient calcium chloride is available. Use as a preventive spray on developing fruit. If you use it to treat plants with an existing problem, you will first need to prune off any fruit that have blossom end rot as the spray is a preventative and will not take away the rot from already affected fruit.

Catfacing

A condition where the tomato is scarred or even split on the blossom end of the fruit. **Causes:** Exposure to temperatures below 50 degrees during flowering and fruit set OR erratic soil moisture.

Yellow Leaves

May be caused by overwatering if leaves are yellowing from the center outward. (*If the vine is wilting but the soil is moist this is likely*). However, as the foliage gets overgrown later in the season, you may just need to prune out some of the suckers and excess leaves as the sun may not be getting to the interior of the plant.