

Tomato Tips

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Determinate tomatoes: smaller varieties that grow to a fixed mature size and ripen all their fruit in a short period (usually about two weeks). Do not prune determinate tomato plants.

Indeterminate tomatoes: vining plants that continue growing in length and set fruit throughout the growing season.

Seed and plant in succession to get the greatest number of tomatoes throughout the season – early-season tomatoes, which will produce fruit in 60 to 70 days; mid-season tomatoes produce fruit in 75 to 80 days, and late-season varieties that come on in 85 to 90 days.

To Prune or Not to Prune?

There are several reasons why you might want to prune your tomatoes, including to prevent disease; to remove sucker-branches that can crowd the plant (but suckers produce tomatoes) for shape and growth habit, especially for espaliering or single-stem vertical growing; to slow or stop growth near the end of the growing season.

- To help reduce the risk of disease, the lower leaf stems of the plant should be removed, and any upper leaves that hang to the soil surface should be pinched back to avoid soil contact. As the plant grows, continue to remove the lower stems until there is about 8 to 10 inches of space between the lowest set of leaves and the soil.

Aren't they warm season crops?

- Tomatoes don't like temps. above 90 degrees – drape 30% shade cloth above plants once our temps rise and leave on throughout the season.
- Blossoms drop when temps. rise
- They do not perform well when our nighttime temps. fall below 55 degrees.

Why do I have so many green tomatoes at the end of the season?

- Successful pollination requires temperatures between 70 and 85 degrees, otherwise blossoms are dropped from the plant.
- It takes six to eight weeks from the time of pollination until the tomato fruit reaches its full maturity – meaning that the tomato fruit is fully developed, but not ripe. This is known as the “mature green” stage.
- Ripening and color development in tomatoes is controlled by two factors: temperature and the naturally occurring hormone, ethylene.
- The optimal temperature for ripening mature green tomatoes is between 68 and 77 degrees. The further the temperature moves in either direction from that optimum, the slower the process will be.
- When temperatures are consistently over 85 degrees the production of lycopene and carotene, which are the pigments that give tomatoes their color, stops. This causes the fruit to remain in a mature green stage until conditions become more favorable.
- This means that extended periods of excessive heat can significantly slow down or even stop the ripening process in tomatoes. Combine that with our chilly start to summer, and the end results are green tomatoes.

Ripening Green Tomatoes

- Choose tomatoes that show some coloring – from light green to creamy white to pale pink, along with any mature green fruit. These are usually the largest tomatoes on the vine.
- Disregard any fruit that is immature. It will not ripen off the vine and can be composted.
- Place tomatoes that are showing some coloring on a kitchen counter, out of direct sunlight. The naturally occurring ethylene gas in the fruit will gradually ripen it. This method works best on tomatoes that have some coloring as they produce more ethylene. Tomatoes will ripen anywhere within a few days to up to two weeks depending on the ambient temperature and how much coloring the fruit has.
- Mature green tomatoes with little coloring produce lower levels of ethylene and should be ripened in a breathable paper or cotton bag with an apple peel or banana. These fruits produce a great amount of ethylene gas and will speed up the natural ripening process. Check the tomatoes daily and remove any spoiled tomatoes or fruit (replace banana or apple peels if needed). Mature green tomatoes usually ripen within a week using this method.

Blossom End Rot

The blossom end of fruit brown or turns callused. This is only a watering issue. Water consistently and deeply. Don't stress them out by cutting off water, it only leads to this disorder. Adding calcium is ineffective because our soils and plants have enough in this area. Dry soil inhibits the uptake of available calcium. The first few fruits of the season always exhibit this disorder as well as plants grown in pots. Keep consistent with your watering (at the soil level only).

Numerous handouts can be sourced from our website: <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/county/kootenai/garden>

Or by using this QR code with your camera phone:



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