

Tomato mania

Pop into your local nursery right now and you'll see tomatoes taking up more space than just about anything. For tomatoes continue to be Australia's favourite home grown produce. Ever wondered why home grown tomatoes taste so great? Well, commercial crops of tomatoes destined for long trips in refrigerated transport have been bred with certain enzymes removed to prevent rotting. This means thick, rubbery tomatoes that look and taste like cricket balls! Fortunately, local nurseries are stocking more heirloom varieties allowing you to experiment with tomatoes previously only available through niche online seed sellers.



Wood ash from a fireplace is a good source of pot ash - just using sparingly to avoid changing soil pH

Your best tomato season ever

Tomatoes are actually part of the large Solanum family which includes eggplants, capsicums, chillies and even potatoes. Diseases can remain in the soil and nutrients can be depleted so, moving your tomatoes to a new patch every year makes sense on lots of levels.

To get lots of lovely tomatoes we want to encourage flower and therefore fruit development. Sprinkle a small handful of "potash" around your tomatoes when

planting, and liquid feed with lower nitrogen feeds, otherwise you'll end up with lots of big green leaves and no tomatoes.

Let them climb

Tomatoes are either vine types which climb or bush types who keep their fruit closer to the ground. Place 6ft stakes, star pickets or mesh in the ground before planting climbing varieties to prevent any damage to roots. Bush varieties also likely to have some form of support, after all it gets tiring holding onto all that fruit!



Use a figure 8 pattern around your tomato stems when tying as it allows them to grow while still holding securely

Water regularly to prevent disease problems. Water the ground (rather than the plant itself) to prevent fungal problems and regular watering will help maintain a constant nutrient supply to the plant to prevent calcium deficiency - which shows up as blossom end rot. This is particularly nasty and makes your prize tomatoes look pretty horrible and not particularly appetising.

Tomatoes actually don't need to ripen on the vine, in fact too much sun on a tomato will damage its skin. Instead tomatoes ripen by temperature and will happily continue to ripen if you pick them once they just start to blush.

If we experience a particularly hot summer, leave plenty of foliage on your tomato plants to help shade the fruit.

Place your tomato plants in full sun and pick the fruit as it just starts to ripen to avoid sun damage and sharing your crop with birds!



What to plant now in your veggie patch

Asian greens (shady area only)	Kohlrabi
Artichoke (Globe)	Leek
Basil	Lettuce
Beans (climbing and bush)	Mitzuna
Beetroot	Parsley
Broccoli	Parsnip
Capsicum	Potato
Carrots	Pumpkin
Celery	Radish
Celeriac	Rocket
Chicory	Rockmelon
Chilli	Sage
Chives	Silverbeet
Coriander (shady, damp area)	Squash
Cucumber	Sunflowers
Eggplant	Sweet corn
Globe Artichoke	Tomato
Kale, Collard greens	Turnips/Swedes
	Watermelon
	Zucchini

Fruiting vegetables such as eggplants, chillies, capsicums and tomatoes love the heat, so plant them in the hottest part of your garden. Leafy green vegetables prefer dappled shade over summer.

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