

Ten Tips for Terrific Tomatoes

Brian L. Triplett — County Extension Agent AG/NR, Bowie County, TX* (3/11)

1. Tomatoes need to be planted into a soil that drains well in a location that receives at least 8 hours of direct sunlight per day. The more direct sunlight, the better.
2. Select recommended varieties and plant transplants in the Spring after frost danger is past (around April 1) and in the Fall by mid-July (to get a crop in prior to typical first frost).
3. Purchase large, vigorous transplants and plant 1 to 2 inches deeper than the transplant is currently growing in its container. Incorporate 1/4 to 1/2 cup of a complete, slow-release fertilizer into the bottom of the hole at planting. Place one to two inches of soil between the transplant and the fertilizer to protect the plant's roots from fertilizer damage.
4. Stake or cage tomatoes for support. Caged tomatoes can be wrapped with a layer of row cover, which can add up to 4° F frost protection, decrease wind and insect damage, and increase fruit yield up to 30% by helping young plants get established. Remove row cover when plants are 2 to 2.5 feet tall.
5. Apply weekly foliar sprays of a water soluble fertilizer with micronutrients. Maintain soil moisture at a constant level. Irregular watering leads to blossom end rot and fruit cracking.
6. At first fruit set, work 2 to 3 tablespoons of a high nitrogen fertilizer into the soil around each plant. Nitrogen is the first number in a typical fertilizer label (Nitrogen - Phosphorous - Potassium).
7. Scout plants for signs of diseases such as early blight and insect pests such as stink bugs and tomato hornworms. Treat each pest with a recommended, labeled product. Follow all label requirements for the time to wait between treating plants and harvesting fruit again.
8. Fruit set is affected by night time temperatures. Nights below 50° F delay the time from pollination to fertilization, causing flowers to drop. Nights above 70° F disrupt pollen shed, causing flower drop on large fruited varieties.
9. Harvest fruits at the first sign of a break in color from green to pink. Tomatoes harvested at this stage will be just as tasty as those left on the vine to fully ripen. Early harvest will increase yields and reduce bird damage. Ripen fruits in a single layer at room temperature, not in the refrigerator. Chill in fridge prior to serving.
10. The average home gardener can expect around 10 pounds of tomatoes per plant for the growing season. With excellent growing conditions and very diligent care, modern hybrids can yield up to 50 pounds of fruit per plant. Happy Gardening!

* Adapted from "Everything You Wanted to Know About Tomatoes" by Tom LeRoy, CEA-Horticulture, Montgomery Co. TX



Deciphering the Tomato Alphabet (those letters behind the variety name):

ASC — Resistant to Alternaria Stem Canker	V — Resistant to Verticillium Wilt
BSp — Resistant to Bacterial Speck	V1 — Resistant to Verticillium Wilt Race1
F — Resistant to Fusarium Wilt	V2 — Resistant to Verticillium Wilt Race2
F1 — Resistant to Fusarium Wilt Race1	TMV — Resistant to Tomato Mosaic Virus
F2 — Resistant to Fusarium Wilt Race2	St — Resistant to Stemphylium (gray leaf spot)
N — Resistant to Nematodes	
D—means the tomato is determinate. These tomato plants tend to be more compact in size and the tomato sets fruit that tend to all ripen in a short period of time.	
I—means the tomato is indeterminate. These tomato plants tend to grow taller throughout the growing season and will set fruit season-long, ending with the first frost.	

Recommended Tomato Varieties for Bowie County (and days to harvest):

<p>Large Varieties (> 12 ounces)</p> <p>Better Boy (I) 70</p> <p>Big Beef (I) 75</p> <p>Brandywine (I) (Heirloom) 80</p> <p>Early Big Red (I) 90</p> <p>Floradade (D) 80</p>	<p>Medium (4 to 11 ounces)</p> <p>Carnival (D) 70</p> <p>Celebrity (D) 70</p> <p>Golden Jubilee (I) (Heirloom) 72</p> <p>Porter Improved (I) 78</p>
<p>Paste</p> <p>Chico III (D) 70</p> <p>Roma (D) 75</p>	<p>Small (< 3 ounces)</p> <p>Cherry Grande (D) 74</p> <p>Small Fry (D) 65</p> <p>Sunsugar (I) (Cherry) 62</p>

Tomato Pests and Possible Control Methods:

Stink Bugs — Endosulfan, Cyfluthrin, Bifenthrin, Permethrin, Spinosid, Pyrethrum, Neem Oil
Tomato Hornworm — Sevin, Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis), Insecticidal Soap
Early Blight — Chlorothanonil, Maneb, Copper products, Bacillus subtilis (Kodiak), Potassium bicarbonate (Firststep)

Trade names of commercial products used in this publication are included only for better understanding and clarity. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas A&M University System is implied.

Educational programs of Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

The Texas A&M System, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.