

## **Ten Tips for Trouble Free Tomatoes**

1. **Proper Placement**: Tomatoes need at least six hours of direct sunlight per day. Leave plenty of space between plants for good air circulation. Staking also helps.
2. **Rotate Crops**: Many disease spores can live in the soil for years. Don't grow tomatoes or related plants like peppers and eggplant in the same spot year after year. If you cannot rotate, plant tomatoes in large containers and change the soil annually.
3. **Improve Soil**: Get tomatoes off to a good start by planting them in well-drained, weed free soil that is enriched with organic matter like well-rotted compost.
4. **Correct Watering**: Deep, slow watering encourages good root formation and is better than short, frequent irrigation. Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation systems to avoid wetting foliage, which can lead to fungal issues. Water early in the day so plants dry before evening. By keeping moisture levels consistent you'll help prevent problems like blossom end rot and leaf curl.
5. **Mulch**: Reduce weeds and maintain consistent moisture levels by spreading mulch around plants; straw is best. Leave space around the stem. Mulching reduces the spread of early blight and other diseases by preventing spores from splashing onto plants.
6. **Encourage Beneficial Insects**: Praying mantis, predatory wasps, lady beetles and toads are natural predators that reduce tomato pests. Keep them happy by avoiding the use of pesticides in your garden.
7. **Don't Smoke**: If you smoke, wash your hands, clothing and tools carefully before working in your garden to avoid spreading tobacco mosaic virus.
8. **Sanitation**: Remove garden debris, leaf litter and weeds to keep pests and pathogens away. To avoid spreading diseases, sterilize garden tools in a solution made from one part bleach to nine parts water.
9. **Solarize Soil**: Want to control weeds, fungi and nematode diseases before you plant? Soil solarization kills weed seeds and diseases without chemicals. Cover wet garden soil with clear plastic sheets to trap the sun's heat. Solarization works best in areas with a long, hot growing season, and requires at least 4-6 weeks.
10. **Plant Proper Varieties**: Hundreds of tomato varieties are available, so select the types that grow best in your area. Look for healthy green leaves and stems when buying a plant. Check carefully for pests or diseased plant parts so you don't introduce these problems to your garden.