

Horticulture Hints

April 2009

The basics of growing tomatoes

Here are a few tips for selecting and growing delicious tomatoes in your own backyard.

1. Pick the right variety – Tomato varieties are generally divided into three categories; determinate, indeterminate and semi-determinate. If space is limited, choose a determinate variety. They are much shorter and are well suited to container growing. Indeterminate varieties can become quite large and will need to be staked and grown in a garden setting.

2. Space them correctly – Plant tomatoes at least two feet apart to give the plants plenty of room to grow and to place cages. Correct spacing aids with good air circulation, which minimizes disease problems. Keep in mind the ultimate height the plant will reach. For example, indeterminate varieties can get eight feet tall.

3. Plant what you can use and maintain; four to six plants is generally more than enough to supply a family with plenty of tomatoes for the year. Save room in the garden to plant some other cool plants like peppers or eggplant.

4. Plant in a sunny spot – Tomato plants need at least seven hours of sunlight each day. Too much shade will make the plant very spindly and produce little fruit.

5. Plant in good amended soil – You will need a well-drained site that you have worked compost into for the best production. Loamy soils work best, not heavy clay.

6. Don't overfeed – Tomatoes do not like too much fertilization, so use a balanced formula such as 10-10-10. Look for fertilizers recommended specifically for tomatoes. Too much fertilizer on tomatoes will produce plenty of foliage, but very little fruit.

7. Don't water overhead – The best way to water tomato plants is with a soaker hose providing about an inch of moisture a week. Even watering practices keeps them from cracking.

8. Watch for disease and insects – It is always best to take care of a problem before it gets too bad to handle. Select tomato varieties

that are resistant to wilts, and watch for insects like spider mites, aphids and hornworms. Check with our Garden Store for the best method of dealing with disease and insect problems.

9. Rotate your crops – Each year, choose a different spot in the garden to plant to help minimize disease problems. Always clean up last year's plants and leaves to eliminate the continuation of problems from year to year.

10. Enjoy the fruits of your labor – The best part is eating a vine-ripened tomato, grown with your own hard work! 🌿

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Purchase and take home the entire 5-step Fertilome lawn program, and receive 10% off regular retail price.

What to do in April

- Plant: trees, shrubs, perennials, cole crops, pansies, snapdragons & petunias
- Prune overgrown Junipers and Yews
- Spray Apple and Crabapple trees for cedar apple rust
- Check pines for disease
- Prune, uncover, fertilize and plant roses in early to mid-April
- Seed or sod cool season grass
- Fertilize perennials
- Tune into 1350 KMAN Radio every Saturday morning at 8:06 for Blueville's Horticulture Hints!



Nancy's Notebook

Planning a new flower bed

It is spring and we all want to get out there and plant. Some may even want to make a new planting bed. I find it is best to start out with a plan and go from there.

Draw the area to scale on paper. Establish the shape of the bed so the curves or lines look good; make sure it is easy to maintain the area around the edge. Next, place plants in your plan to fit the area with proper spacing. Remember, odd numbers always look best.

Feel free to present the plan to one of us at the store, and we can help you with plant choices and see if your bed design will be a good layout.

Now it is time to prepare the bed. You can use a garden hose or marking paint from the local hardware store and mark out the lines of your bed.

If you have existing plant material such as grass or weeds, you will first need to spray with glyphosate, (Killzall) to kill all vegetation in the area. I recommend

you wait a week before working the soil after spraying. Then remove the sod or weeds by peeling back the top layer.

Install edging; steel edging is often preferred for its sturdiness and longevity.

In any planting bed or garden, it is important to incorporate compost. Cotton burr compost is a really great product for amending soils. It adds great organic matter to aid in drainage and a bit of acidity to our alkaline soils. Add about 3" of compost and till into the existing bed.

Now you are ready to plant. First, set out your plants as you have them laid out in your design to get the proper spacing and order. Step back and make sure this is how you want it arranged. I pick up the container and score a circle in the soil to know exactly where to dig the hole. Mulch with 2 to 3" of bark or rock, then water the new plant material long and slow.

Hint: to keep out weeds without using mulch, put down a pre-emergent such as Dimension to keep weed seeds from germinating. Now, all you have to do is watch your results grow and keep it maintained by watering, pruning and fertilizing. 🌱

GERANIUM SALE

Friday & Saturday, April 10 & 11

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Everything pink in the store is 10% off.

10% of the weekend's proceeds will be donated to breast cancer research.

