



Tomatoes



Sweet, juicy, vine-ripened tomatoes are a delicious addition to loads of pizza recipes.

Whether you're chopping or roasting for a topping or stirring into a sauce, tomatoes are full of robust flavour – but they have to be treated right, or else they could go mealy, sour, or soggy.

It's best to use your tomatoes the same day that you've picked them or while they are still warm from the sun. This is how you get maximum flavour and deliciousness from your tomatoes.

Tomatoes are quite possibly the most important topping of the pizza, so you'll want to get these right when growing your own.



Tomatoes

If you wanted to grow tomatoes the long way, you could buy seeds and sow them with a good-quality compost indoors between late-Jan to late-March. But there are simpler ways of growing tomatoes that are beautifully ripe and juicy in your own garden – follow these steps to get to tomato heaven in way less time!

Choose your tomato plant

Tomatoes are split into two main growing types: determinate (bush) and indeterminate (cordon). Bush types are usually planted in a container and their stems trail around the edge. Cordon types are trained to grow tall and are supported by a cane or stake.

If you are new to growing tomatoes then it's a good idea to grow bush tomatoes, as you don't need to stake them or pinch out growing tips.

The varieties Totem, Tumbler and Tumbling Tom are the easiest to grow. They do not need the usual tying and pinching out of side shoots.

Sowing time

Heated Greenhouse > February – March
Cold Greenhouse > April – May
Outdoors > May – June

Planting your tomatoes

Tomatoes love the sun, but not too much of it and rich, fertile soil or peat-free potting compost. Find a spot in your garden that's sunny yet sheltered. Against a garden wall will be perfect, plus this will help to protect your plant from strong winds.

You can choose to plant your tomato plants into growbags, pots or a well-composted section of your garden. Tumbling tomatoes also grow well in hanging baskets!

Pots

Make sure your pot has good holes in the bottom to allow good drainage.

Fill 30cm pots up to halfway with compost, then carefully transfer your tomato plant into the pot, before filling and packing with more rich soil.

Growbags

It is a good idea to cut some holes in the bottom of the grow-bag before planting as this provides drainage to prevent water-logging. Cut holes in the bag to fit between 2 and 3 tomato plants in. Create a nice sized hole for the plant in the soil and place the plant in this hole. Fill the soil back in around the plant and pat down. It is important to support the plant with a cane as it grows.

In the garden

Planting straight into the garden requires some preparation. During the winter, dig the patch thoroughly and incorporate some compost. Shortly before planting, rake in a general fertiliser.

Hanging basket

Some varieties of tomato are well suited to growing in hanging baskets, and this space-saving display is perfect for small gardens and balconies.

Crop Care

Once flowers appear, feed your plants weekly with tomato fertiliser. Keep tomatoes well-watered because irregular watering causes fruit to split or develop hard black patches, known as blossom-end rot. This is caused by a lack of calcium, which is found in water.

With bush tomatoes, which have a sprawling habit, you can pretty much leave them to get on with it. If the fruits are hidden under the leaves, thin out the foliage a little to let the sun through to ripen them.

Harvesting your tomatoes

Pick your tomatoes when they look bright red and keep growing outdoors until the first frost – which is likely to be in September. If the weather suddenly turns cold mid-season, pick your yellow or orange tomatoes with their stem and bring in to ripen indoors. Try to leave your green tomatoes on the plant until they develop a bit of colour – this will help them develop flavour.

Top tip to ripen tomatoes indoors

When ripening tomatoes indoors, think somewhere warm, dry, and dark.

So, when ripening your yellowy-orange tomatoes, the best place to store them is in a drawer, a cardboard box, or a paper bag. Add in a banana to help generate the ripening gas ethylene – it'll speed the whole process up!

After 2 weeks max, your tomatoes should be lovely and ruby-red. Give them a wash and transform in into your favourite pizza ingredient.