



GROWING A GREAT TOMATO

Gardening in Colorado is not for the faint at heart. This guide and others like it will help encourage a rooted hope in you as you dig in the dirt.

Handy Dandy Gardening Guide

In Colorado, gardeners can have great success with tomatoes! But to have this great success, five primary concerns related to growing tomatoes in Colorado must be addressed. Read on to learn what the concerns are and how to respond well to each one. Growing tomatoes is not hard but I imagine you want to stand the best chance at slicing a beautiful homegrown tomato this year.

For tomatoes, warm is their name of the game. Tomatoes do not like to get too cold. Here in Colorado our May and early June evenings can get below 50 degrees. And if that happens, the tomatoes you plant might suffer. Their growth might be stunted or delayed to the point that there is no longer enough of a season to get the plant to its fullest maturity. Thus, **CONCERN NUMBER ONE** is keeping your tomatoes warm at night. I do this by using a wonderful product called Wall-O-Water. In late April, I put these on the soil where I will place my tomato plant, allowing it to heat up the soil. Then about 1-2 weeks later I plant my tomato seedlings in the dirt inside the wall. Let me tell you, as soon as I started using this product, my tomatoes grew so much better. Use the product that is green in color. They stand up better than the red ones. Remove the walls in late June (or earlier if they grow quickly).

CONCERN NUMBER TWO is an important but easy one to address. Tomatoes do not like wet feet. Thus, don't put your tomatoes near other plants that will need a lot of watering. For example, if you meet a nearby cucumber's watering needs, you may end up drowning your tomato. Instead, put your tomatoes in a place where you can water it less often, giving a good long soak 2-3 times a week instead of every day (like cucumbers need here in Colorado). Tomatoes like their feet to dry out in between waterings.

Related to the second concern, **CONCERN NUMBER THREE** is that tomatoes do not like shallow feet. In other words, they like their roots to be deep in the soil. So when you go to plant them, plant

them deep, right up to the first set of leaves. I've even gone so far as to take off the first set of leaves so I can put the tomato in even deeper. And, if the tomato seedling is leggy (overly tall) I turn the stem on the side. This is called "trench planting."

And now, **CONCERN NUMBER FOUR**. Most garden soil in Colorado is lacking in calcium. One way to address this is to add one tablespoon of Epsom salt into the soil when you put in your tomato. This is a very simple solution to an important concern! Why? You will most likely avoid the blossom end-rot on your fruits.

And since number four was so simple, this leaves me room to address **CONCERN NUMBER FIVE**. Tomatoes love to be fed but hate to have too much nitrogen as too much can cause the blossoms to drop off the plant, resulting in a lower yield of fruit! Do use some fertilizer on your tomatoes, but pay attention to the numbers on the side of the bag. Choose a fertilizer that has a low nitrogen number (first number of the three you'll see on the side of your fertilizer bag). I use Espoma Tomato-Tone (3-4-6) with great results. I do NOT use miracle grow.

Since I'm out of room on this one page Handy Dandy Gardening Guide, I won't address other concerns related to pest control, staking of plants, spacing of plants, etc. Address these **FIVE CONCERNS** that are particular to Colorado and I bet you have greater chance of tomato success. Hopefully you can get help with anything else by accessing what is easily found on the web.

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