

# Tips to Grow Tons of Tomatoes

## Some of the Best Tomato Varieties for North Texas

<u>Large Varieties - Transplants</u>		<u>Roma Varieties - Transplants</u>	
Celebrity	Det * VFFNTA	Health Kick	Det VFFA
Carnival	Det * VFFNTA	Roma	Ind VF
President	Det * VFNT	Viva Italia	Det F1
Superfantastic	Ind VFN	San Marzano	Ind SM2 - VF
Early Girl	Ind VFF	<u>Cherry Type Varieties - Transplants</u>	
Champion	Ind VFNT	Sweet Millions	Ind VFN
Solar Set	Det	Sweet 100	Ind
Sun Master	Det *	Yellow Pear	Ind
Heat Wave II	Det VF1F2SA	Small Fry	Det VFN
Tycoon	Det VFNT	Porter	Ind

Tomato seed sources - Tomato Growers Supply Co. -Totally Tomatoes - Victory Seed Co - Tomatofest.com  
Transplants - North Haven, Nicholson-Hardie, Redenta's, Bruce Miller, Calloway's and most nurseries

Tomato Cultivars - Det are determinate or bush types that set fruit at one time.  
Det \* are determinates with a more vigorous growth habit.  
Ind are indeterminate or vining types that continue to set fruit longer.

Maturity - The number of days from transplanting to the first mature fruit. Early-Season varieties generally mature between 55 to 68 days; Mid-Season varieties- 69 to 79 days; Late-Season from 80 days and beyond.

Disease resistance labeling codes: **A** - Alternaria, **BS** - Bacterial Speck **V** - Verticillium wilt, **F** - Fusarium wilt 1 & 2, **N** - Root Knot Nematode, **T** - Tobacco Mosaic virus, **S** - Stemphylium.

Every year, gardeners report plants that do not bloom or drop their blossoms and fail to set fruit or are plagued with pests or diseases. The following are a few solutions and recommendations that will help.

Blossom-end rot - To avoid blossom-end rot, use cultural practices that allow for proper uptake of calcium by the plant. Avoid water stress in soil moisture by using deep irrigation to keep the soil uniformly moist. Do not allow plants to be water stressed at night. The best way to maintain even soil moisture is by using organic or plastic mulch to prevent fluctuations in soil moisture. Apply Epsom salts at planting time and mid-season. Avoid over-fertilizing before fruit set occurs. To avoid injuring roots, do not hoe or cultivate near plants. Pull weeds next to plants or use mulch. Do not overwater, especially in heavy clay soils.

Temperature - Large fruited varieties like Big Boy, Beefsteak and other similar types will stop setting fruit when nighttime temperatures exceed 75° and day temperatures stay in the 90's. (Median temp exceeds 81°) Medium fruited varieties like Celebrity, Carnival, Early Girl plus Roma type and Cherry type will continue to set fruit until nighttime temperatures exceed 85° in most cases. Many recommended varieties will not set fruit below 60°. Plant the most heat resistant types as a second season or fall crop by July 5 as transplants and by June 1 as direct seed in the garden. To raise soil temps in early March apply black plastic cover to your raised beds two weeks ahead of planting time. Soil temperature should be a minimum of 60° F before transplants are set out.

*Tip* - Buy a probe type thermometer (about \$10) available in the kitchenware department of most stores.

Watering Methods - Excessive or insufficient watering techniques can cause plant stress and blossom drop. When supplemental watering is needed, the soil should be watered slowly and deeply, and then allow the top inch or two to dry out before watering again. Avoid overhead watering. Use drip, pipe, soaker or hand watering when ever possible. The use of weed block fabric or plastic can help retain moisture and prevent prolonged spring rain accumulation causing water-logged soils.

*Tip* - Buy (about \$10) and use a moisture meter.

Spraying Program - Pests: Use Bt to kill chewing insects like the Tomato Hornworm. Use SunSpray™ horticultural oil to smother pests including spider mites. Plant Tonic: Use seaweed and Superthrive™ to boost plant health. Fungal Diseases: Use Baking soda with SunSpray™ Ultra-fine or Neem oil. Note: Always spray on shady days, in afternoon shade or in early evening. Spray under sides of leaves as well as tops. Canola oil or very fine vegetable oil can be used in place of the ultra-fine, (1 to 2 tbsp per Gal.) but spray a test area first to be safe.

Formula: 2 tbsp Ultra-fine horticultural or Neem oil (kills aphids, spider mites, and inhibits fungal spores)  
1 tbsp baking soda (reduces early blight, black spot, powdery mildew and their spores)  
1 tbsp. seaweed (deters spider mites) 3 to 5 drops each of Superthrive™ and dishwashing liquid (plant tonic and soap as a surfactant) Note: Remove lower leaves to minimize fungal disease spread.  
Do not spray solutions containing oil on the plant flower, as it will reduce pollination.  
DO NOT add anything containing sulfur with an oil product. (This will burn the plant leaves)

Fertility - Excess nitrogen prior to first fruit set can result in reduced flowering and fruit production. At planting time use a root stimulator solution and/or seaweed solution plus a water-soluble fertilizer, such as 20-5-10 and magnesium sulfate (Epsom salts). Incorporate the fertilizer into the soil prior to planting, and soak the root ball in root stimulator/seaweed. Add Epsom salts and sugar around the plant at the time of transplant. Only moderate fertilizer should be needed until the first fruit are about one inch in diameter. At this point the main nutrient needed is nitrogen. Apply 1 tbsp. per gallon water-soluble high nitrogen fertilizer around each plant weekly. A granular slow release type can be used less often. Organic fertilizers can be used as a top dressing of about 1/4 inch deep around each plant as blooming begins. (Foliar Feeding Formula, use 1 tsp. water-soluble fertilizer or 1 tbsp seaweed and 1 tsp. Epsom salts per gallon of water.) Always read and follow label directions.

Mulch - Moisture loss and high soil temperatures can cause plant stress that will invite not only blossom drop, but spider mites plus other pests and diseases as well. Use black plastic to raise and maintain soil temperature in Feb and March. Use an organic mulch of 2 to 3 inches deep to minimize these problems including blossom end rot and early blight (Early blight is a fungal organism that is splashed up on plant leaves by rain and overhead irrigation). Place two tooth picks against stem at planting to thwart cutworm.

Nematodes - These are microscopic worms that feed upon the roots, causing root knots that result in decreased growth, vigor and production. Select plant varieties that have resistance. Look for the capital letter 'N' following the variety name. To reduce the presents of root knot nematodes in your raised bed gardens add large amounts of organic material (finished compost), except manure. Add a quarter to half-cup of sugar around your transplants and water in, this will fire up the beneficial microbes that will help combat these pests. Adding a small amount of horticultural sulfur (1 to 2 cups per 100-sq. ft.) will help reduce soil pH and discourage these pests in your beds.

Sun and Wind - High winds in spring can cause desiccation of the plants and loss of blooms. Intense direct summer sun can cause leaf burn and fruit scald. If possible, provide west shade in late afternoon. Also, use of a shade cover material can help reduce sunburn and windburn and fruit drop.

**Dallas County Master Gardener Association is a non-profit, educational and volunteer service organization affiliated with Texas AgriLife Extension Service, an agency of Texas A&M University.**

**On the internet: [www.dallascountymastergardeners.org](http://www.dallascountymastergardeners.org)  
<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>**

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