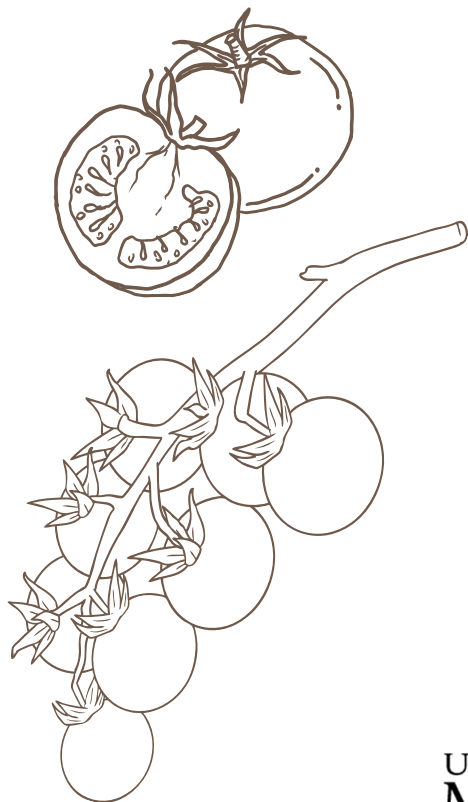


GROWING GREAT TOMATOES

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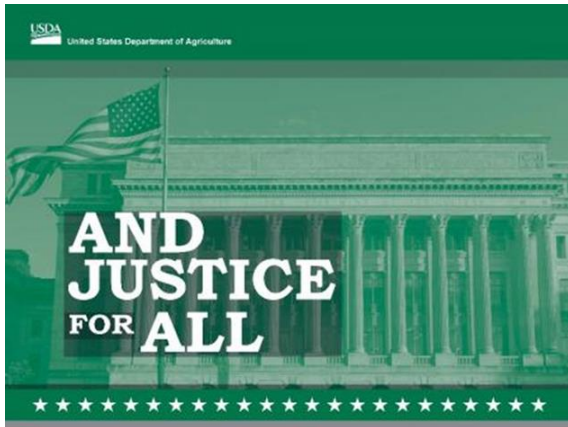


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A MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM



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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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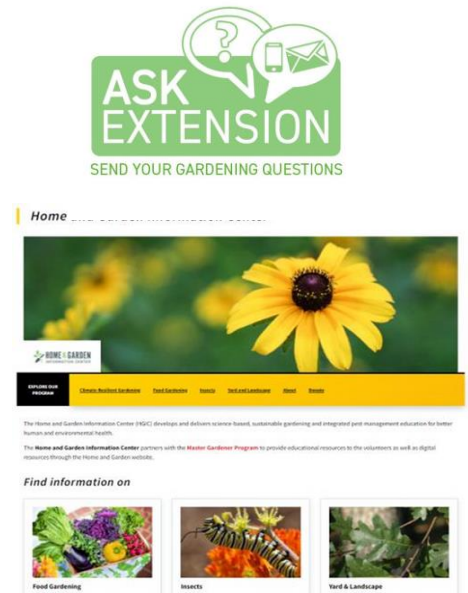
Grow It Eat It (GIEI) is a Master Gardener sub-program that:

- Teaches and promotes food gardening knowledge and skills
- Supports MG demonstration, school, and community gardens
- Works on projects with community partners and other UME programs, like SNAP-Ed and 4-H



UME Gardening and Pest Information

- Web pages- all topics- go.umd.edu/hgic
- [Maryland Grows blog](#)
- [Extensión en Español](#))
- [HGIC YouTube channel](#)
- [Ask Extension](#)- send gardening questions and photos 24/7



Resources

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Questions & Answers about Growing Tomatoes

Q: What are simple tips for growing tomatoes for home use?

- Do a soil test and follow recommendations
- Choose sunny location, min. 8 to 10 hrs. more is better
- Choose varieties meeting your needs
- Consider spacing & staking or caging
- Don't over-fertilize, consider slow-release organic fertilizer that meet soil test recommendations
- Insure 1-inch water per week (2-4 gallons per plant depending on size)

Q: How do I choose good plants?

- Look for short, stocky plants with dark-green leaves
- Avoid plants that evidence disease (yellow leaves) or damage
- Check label for resistance to diseases & pests (VFN...) and whether variety is determinate or indeterminate
- Shop when new plants have arrived, often just before the weekend
- If growing your own, start plants five weeks before plant out date

Q: What do “determinate” and “indeterminate” mean?

- Determinate (aka “short”) varieties grow to the pre-determined height of the cultivar. They tend to produce fruit over a shorter time period and then die. They are great for people that process/can or freeze their fruit. Do **NOT** prune determinate varieties.
- Indeterminate (aka “tall”) varieties produce fruit throughout the season, until frost kills the plant. Fruit set in early September will normally ripen before frost.

Q: What do the abbreviations after variety names mean?

Celebrity Hybrid VFFNTASt

Resistance to

V = Verticillium Wilt

F = Fusarium Wilt

FF = Races 1 & 2

FFF = Races 1, 2, & 3

N = Nematodes

T = Tobacco Mosaic Virus

A = Alternaria Stem Canker

St = Stemphylium Gray Leaf Spot

TSWV = Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus

Q: Should I plant only heirlooms or only hybrids?

A: Planting both can be insurance against disease or pest problems. Heirlooms usually don't have any disease resistance, but many people say they taste better.

A: Plant to your taste, but try a new variety

Q: Should I fertilize my plants as they grow?

- A: Depends on your soil. If you have good soil with lots of organic matter worked into it, you probably won't need additional nitrogen. If you haven't improved your soil, you may need additional nitrogen.
- A: Too much nitrogen: One of the two major reasons of "too many vines, too few tomatoes." Other reason: Too little direct sunlight. May contribute to blossom-end rot.

Q: Do specialty fertilizers, such as “Tomatoes Alive,” do any good?

- A: The simple answer is NO! Relatively inexpensive sources organic or inorganic nutrients are available.
- A: Rely on the results of your soil test to determine what nutrients or soil pH adjustments your tomatoes require.
- A: Of course, your plants wouldn't know the difference between expensive and inexpensive nutrients.

Q: When should I transplant?

A: When soil temperature reaches 55 to 60 degrees

- Here, usually mid-May to 1st week of June
- Use of plastic mulch will warm soil
- If planted early, plants may grow slowly & be subject to insect & disease attacks
- Early fruit will have blossom end rot (BER)
- But choice plant varieties may not be available then at retailers, so buy & hold or start your own seed 5 week prior to plant out date.

More transplanting tips ...

- Cloudy, wind-free day – or late afternoon
- If caging or staking tomatoes, plant on North or West side of garden
- Water in with transplant solution
- Remove leaves except top 2-3 inches
- If plants are leggy, bend plants in an L, set in a trench with two sets of leaves showing above the soil line.

Q: Should I stake, cage, or trellis my plants or let them sprawl?

A: Rationale for staking or caging: Maximizes production from limited space; limits diseases and critter access; gives better access to fruit; old back doesn't need to bend as often. Be sure to pinch suckers.

A. "If you let your tomato plants sprawl, make sure you have some sort of dry mulch under them to keep the fruit from rotting."

Q: Why and how should I prune my plants?

A: “Suckers are shoots that arise from axils, the angle where a plant stem and leaf branch meet. These shoots will eventually produce flowers and fruit.

A: Prune lower suckers and leaves up to about 12 to 18 inches above the soil line and mulch soil. This way water won't splash up and start disease on lower leaves.

Q: How can I keep critters from eating my tomatoes?

A: “Fence them in to control most critters.

Squirrels can be especially difficult to control. If birds are a problem, nylon netting can be draped over plants to protect them.

Various visual or sound ‘frightening’ techniques, such as loud noises, lights, and bright reflective objects, can also be very effective. Animals can become accustomed to them over time....

What is picking at “breaker stage”?



Place tomatoes on counter for several days to finishing ripening. Prevents pests like BMSBs and squirrels from damaging fruits.

Q: What are the spots on the lower leaves of my tomatoes and what should I do?

A: Septoria leaf spot, early blight and bacterial leaf spot are all [common tomato problems](#). [Cornell](#) has bred some resistant varieties. As soon as leafspot develops, remove those leaves.

At end of season, remove all infected plant material.

Next year increase spacing of plants to improve airflow, mulch and/or use a fungicide.

Q: What are the black spots on the bottom of my tomatoes, and what can I do to cure them?



Blossom-End Rot is caused by calcium or water deficiency in soil

Blossom-End Rot, p. 2

A: Establish pH of 6.2 to 6.8 & calcium as per soil test*.

Generally this early-season problem “naturally goes away” later in season, more common on paste tomatoes

Don't over-fertilize

Drip irrigate deeply 1 to 4 gallons/plant per week

Remove affected fruit as soon as possible; and

*Test your garden soil every 3 to 5 years.

Q: What's a safe source about canning tomatoes safely?

- National Center for Home Food Preservation
 - Canning tomatoes
 - Recommended book, "So Easy to Preserve," covers canning, freezing, drying, 375 pages, 185 tested recipes, \$18. New demonstration DVDs based on book, \$39.95

May your harvest this season
be as good as this...



Kent Phillips photo

Tomatoes by Kent Phillips, MG

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