



GROWING TOMATOES IN NAPA COUNTY

By Dean B. Donnelly, Farm Advisor



Ready to Plant: Tomato plants produce a wide variety of fruit sizes and colors from reds and yellows to purples. Over 100 named varieties are available to home gardeners. Local trials and farm journals of Napa Gardens suggest the following varieties: lot of variation noted in our coastal growing conditions: Home Boy, Hoopoe, Celebrity, Champion Early Girl, Green Pear, Sweet 100, Supersweet, Mortgage and Yellow Pear.

Requirements: Tomatoes are injured by frost and require consistently warm to hot weather to produce a crop. Cool night temperatures may cause fruit to slip. Tomato plants require warm soil, deep irrigation and full sun exposure all day. Temperature below 55 degrees F inhibits growth and stunts disease, best range is 80--85 degrees F. (See Figure 1.)

Soil Preparation and Planting: Plan site first in April and May. (See Figure 1.) Tomatoes grow best at least 4 feet deep. Double-digging the soil helps loosen plants grow deep roots and will help the concentration of essential nutrients. First irrigation after a winter lettuce cover crop. Tomatoes are responsive users of Nitrogen and Phosphorus, so proper fertilizers should include sources of commercial fertilizers. Use 10 pounds of dry matter (or 10 pound of commercial 10-10-10 fertilizer per 10 square feet of garden. Mix fertilizer in water throughout the top 4 inches of soil before you plant. Transplant seedlings into the field after they are "rooted-off". It is better to plant tomatoes "too deep" than they are too shallow. Set plants two feet apart in rows three feet apart. Water in to settle the soil around the transplants.

Care and Harvest: Tomatoes ripen after about 85 - 100 days, depending on variety. Tomatoes like deep watering once per week to rest of year 7 feet deep. An additional application of Nitrogen fertilizer during bloom will prolong fruit production. Give extra water during hot spells. Harvest fruits regularly to assure continued production. Cool wet fall weather will signal the end of harvest. Pick fruit ripe on the stalk, not too green.



Figure 1.

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