

Tomato

**A most popular plant . . .
and yummy**



**Lethbridge and District Horticultural Society
Feb. 28, 2022**

Tomatoes are

- technically botanical fruits because they are seed-bearing structures that develop from the ripened ovaries of flowers. Call them veggies if you want.

- easy to grow, have much more flavour than what you buy in the store, generally.

- Slicing (e.g. beefsteak, Manitoba, early girl, Bonnie Best - determinate)
- salads, sandwiches, slices with any meal, including with breakfast eggs

- Roma (determinate) - San Marzano, Rio Grande - general for cooking, canning, making salsa

- Slicing and Roma can be canned or frozen for use through the winter in sauces; great for salsa (I have a good recipe)

- Cherry (sun sugar, black cherry, sweet millions - salads, snacks)



Manitoba



Rio Grande



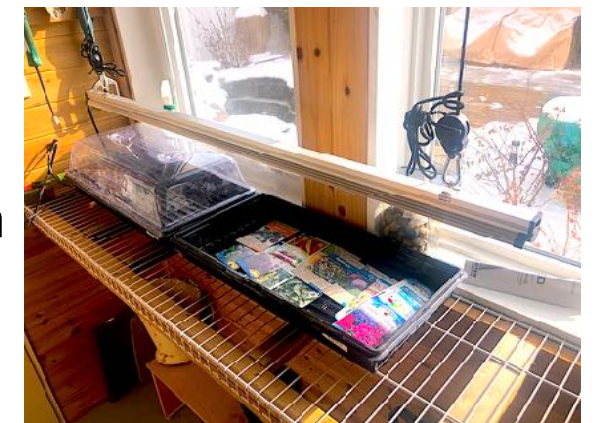
Sun Sugar



Sun Sugar, determinate, continuous growth, needs pruning.

Starting Seeds

- I keep seeds stored in containers in the greenhouse.
- Check packages for how many days to maturity.
- I have been starting seeds indoors for over 20 years, for at least half that in my basement under fluorescent light fixtures.
- The other half have been in a greenhouse, still under fluorescent fixtures.
- This year replaced fixtures with full-spectrum grow lights.
- Mid-March (about 8 weeks before last frost, about May 18 here) plant seeds in seed flats and cells, usually two per cell (JIC).
- Use a seed starting mix, such as Miracle Grow. Wet soil with spray bottle.
- If you plant earlier, more transplanting but you should get tomatoes earlier.
- Friend plants seeds in a cutoff one-litre milk carton. She puts them on a south-facing shelf in her kitchen.
- Cover with a clear dome. Keep light as close as possible to tray. Use a timer for 16 hours (daytime works), or turn on light when you wake up and off when you go to bed.





Transplanting

- Moving seedlings into new pots
- Cotyledon leaves first, usually in a few days, within a week. True leaves follow, in a couple of weeks.



- After true leaves appear, transplant into 3-Inch pots. Move Grow lights as close as possible to dome, then increase height as plants grow.
- Raise light as plants grow. Remove dome when plants touch.

Hardening off

- getting them accustomed to a new environment
- Take the plants outside for an increasing amount of time, starting a couple of weeks before planting in the ground or container.
- Begin in the shade and gradually into sun and wind. Watch them to avoid burning. Continue watering.



Transplanting into the garden or container

• Around here, you risk a late frost which will do in your plants. Post-May 24th is fine. If you want to hedge and plant earlier, be ready to cover them.

- Full sun location, at least six hours a day.
- In the hole, put a tablespoon of epsom salts and Dolomitic lime (calcium and magnesium) or bonemeal (fish heads? composted coffee grounds?) Aids photosynthesis, plant growth, and to prevent blossom-end rot.
- Remove bottom couple of leaves.
- Plant to get as much of the stem as possible in the ground, to the bottom leaves that remain after you removed a couple. Roots will form on the stem. Water.
- If you are planting in containers, replace the soil with clean potting soil.
- Support with stakes or tomato cage



Care, feeding, watering

- Regular watering is important. I use a timer and a drip hose or a solar rain barrel pump to water daily. With drip hose, for 5-10 minutes. Solar pump about the same.
- Feed with regular compost tea or all-purpose fertilizer (you can also use tomato fertilizer) about every two weeks.
- Indeterminant tomato plants (cherry) will get unwieldy and might use some pruning to keep them under control. It's not necessary, but can help. Just avoid branches that have flowers or, obviously, fruit.
- For regular, determinant plants, removing suckers where branches form can provide air circulation and give more energy to producing fruit. Check YouTube for how to remove suckers. Removing branches at ground level will also keep the leaves from rotting and keep the plant healthier.



Harvesting

- 55-60 days should have you eating. Check on seed package for number of days to maturity.
- planting on May 24 should start giving you tomatoes near the end of July.

