

# Ten Steps to Your Best Tomato Year Yet

Bill Thorness | Author, *Cool Season Gardener* and *Edible Heirlooms*

## Tips & Tricks:

- Buy early for best selection, but keep in pots for a few weeks, then pot up to larger size; keep well-watered.
- Harden-off for 4-6 days before planting out in the garden.
- Plant deeply, burying some stem to take advantage of “adventitious rooting.”
- Protect with a cloche or Wall o’Water for first few weeks outdoors; continue to water regularly.
- When ready to remove cloche (early June?) open daily to expose plants to wind and variable temperatures.
- Use trellis or tomato ladder (strong cage) to support vines.
- Prune to a few main leaders; prune suckers through summer.



*Sweet Million*

## Some Favorite Varieties:

Note: two types of plants:

- Determinate: (“det.”) bush type plants, moderate vining, fruit ripens in short time period.
- Indeterminate: (“ind.”) vigorously vining plants, many shoots, continuous fruiting.

*Cherries: (all ind.)*

Yellow Pear, Red Fig, Sweet Million, Sungold (F1), Red Grape, Peacevine, Chadwick’s, Plum

*Extra early:*

Stupice (ind., salad, heirloom, Czech origin, potato-leaf, prolific, tasty)

Early Girl (ind., slicing)

Glacier (det., salad, fewer fruit but earliest)

Also: many with black or purple in their names are shorter season

*Sauce:*

Roma (det.); San Marzano (ind., heirloom); Amish Paste (ind., heirloom, longer season)

*Odd colored:*

Green Zebra (ind., salad, heirloom, bred from an old English variety, salad, prolific)

Cherokee Purple (ind., slicing, heirloom, larger fruit)

Jaune Flamme (ind., salad, heirloom, apricot color, prolific)

Silvery Fir Tree (det., salad, unique foliage, red fruit, great for pots)

*Main season varieties (longer time to harvest):*

Costoluto Genovese (ind., slicing, heirloom, billowy accordion shape, rich, juicy)

Mortgage Lifter (ind., beefsteak, heirloom, vigorous)

Brandywine (ind., beefsteak, heirloom, thin skin, many strains)

#### **Pests:**

- Slugs and snails
  - Handpick and destroy
  - Use copper barriers and/or beer traps
- Flea beetles - small dark beetles that jump like fleas, cause round holes in leaves
  - floating row cover, spray with neem oil
- Tomato hornworms – white striped, green caterpillar
  - Handpick and destroy
  - Plant dill near tomatoes to attract it
- Aphids – tiny white or black, usually seen as a mass, cause shriveled leaves
  - Wash off with water spray
  - Wait for ladybugs to take care of them
- Spider mites – tiny red specks, underside of leaves, cause yellow speckling
  - Wash off with water spray

#### **Diseases:**

- Blossom end rot: Somewhat common tomato disease. Brown rot is seen spreading from blossom end (bottom) of fruit. Caused by various bacteria and fungi; can come on with irregular watering or badly draining soil. Plants with calcium deficiency are most susceptible; treat with bone meal.
- Late blight: Very common in maritime gardens. Plant stops growing, leaves and branches wither, turn brown, may rot. Cause by a fungus called *Phytophthora*; spreads fast on wet leaves and stems. To prevent it, avoid overhead watering and prune for air circulation. Prune off and destroy affected plant material; do not home compost it.

#### **Climate-Change Savviness:**

- Retain soil moisture with mulch
- Build soil to boost plant health
- Water deeply and less frequently to promote resilience
- Consider compact varieties
- Consider shorter season varieties



*Brandywine*