

Growing your own tomatoes is simple - and even just a couple of plants will reward you with plenty of delicious crops in the summer. There are all sizes of tomatoes to try, from the tiniest cherry types through to full-flavoured giant beefsteak tomatoes. Here's our garden4me guide to growing your own tomatoes, our recommendations for which varieties to try and tips on using and preserving what you've grown.



Garden4me raised planters are perfect for growing tomatoes – here are some of the key benefits ..

- The key to a healthy crop of tomatoes is regular, even watering, delivered to the base of the plant (irregular and fluctuating watering can lead to the fruits rotting). With a garden4me raised planter they will get this from the built-in self-regulating 20 Litre reservoir. Even in the hottest temperatures plants stay hydrated as they can drink as much as they want without getting waterlogged. The reservoir typically lasts a few weeks in the summer before needing to be topped up – but for thirsty tomatoes we'd advise you top this up weekly during the hottest periods.
- The deep growing bed means you can grow all varieties successfully – see below for some recommendations
- Tomatoes need feeding regularly – with the garden4me planter you can add a liquid feed directly into the reservoir which means plants get a constant supply – a great help for those of us who can easily forget!

- The double walled construction keeps roots warm and protected – promoting growth and extending the growing season

Planting

Tomatoes are easily grown from seed – sow in March/April – either indoors or in your raised planter under a garden4me polytunnel. Or you can buy young tomato plants when you see them in garden centres. Keep them under the polytunnel for the first few weeks to ensure they are protected to give them a great start.

Plant your tomatoes about 45cm (18 in) apart – or use the garden4me growing pockets to keep your plants separated.



Which varieties are best to grow in a garden4me raised planter?

All types can be grown in your raised planter, but stockier bush types and smaller tumbling varieties are easiest because they don't need pruning or pinching out as they grow.



'Tumbling Tom' in a garden4me raised planter

For best results, choose trusted favourites like Gardener's Delight', 'Money Maker' or 'Sweet Olive'. Some suggestions for small-fruited bush varieties are Tumbling Tom Red', 'Tumbling Tom Yellow' and 'Hundreds and Thousands' – you should be able to find these at your local garden centre.

And why not try a hanging variety such as 'Cherry Cascade' or 'Tasty Tumbler.

Handy tip – if you want to grow organically, plant a few marigolds with your tomatoes – they'll add some colour and their scent is said to help to repel aphids – there's even a variety called 'Tomato Growing Secret' which attracts beneficial insects that eat pests.

Ideal Positions for Growing Tomatoes Outside

Growing tomatoes outdoors can be a chancy business in our climate – tomatoes are very dependent on having enough warmth to give time to grow and crop before the cold comes

again. This is where growing varieties that are suitable for outdoor growing are obviously best. The faster they produce fruit the more chance of a decent crop in our short season.

There's not much we can do about the sun or lack of it but choosing a sunny position, preferably south or south west facing is helpful and sheltered from the wind. Wind can make more of a difference to temperature than most people realise.

And by positioning your planter against a wall means taller varieties will benefit from the warmth the wall absorbs from the sun - helping keep temperatures higher and for longer.

What to do with a glut of tomatoes

In late summer we can find ourselves with glut of tomatoes – the pattern is the same each year starting with just a few in the early days, then just enough, a few too many and then so many that almost every meal contains tomatoes! Here are a few ideas for using your tomatoes and also preserving them so you can enjoy them through the year ...

Pasta Sauce

There are lots of pasta sauce recipes out there so just find your favourite and then use straightaway or freeze.

And a really tasty option is to make your own passata – roast trays of tomatoes with garlic, olive oil and a few herbs, then rub them through a sieve. You can freeze and then use over the colder months as a base for - or addition to - any number of soups, stews and pasta sauces.



Tomato Soup

Home-made tomato soup is simple, healthy and easy to freeze. It's also full of lycopene, which has been shown to fight chronic diseases and increase the body's natural sun protection. Try adding red lentils for extra protein.

Tomato chutney

Great to serve with cold meats and cheeses - and don't forget you can harvest any remaining green tomatoes to use in chutney recipes



Bruschetta

This is a really easy and tasty way to use too many tomatoes. Cut a crusty baguette into slices and toast them on the grill. Then brush with garlic butter or oil. Top with slices of tomato and fresh mozzarella or get adventurous and experiment with additional toppings such as mushrooms, fresh chopped herbs, cheese or prosciutto.

Did you know ... you can clean your face with a tomato? The acids in tomato juice are great for softening and cleaning skin, while the lycopene helps eliminate free radicals.

- For oily skin: mix equal parts fresh tomato juice and aloe vera juice.
- For dry skin: use a ratio of 1 part tomato juice to 2 parts aloe vera juice.

Rub a tablespoon of this mixture into your face and rinse with warm water.

And did you know ... tomatoes are also wonderful at soothing sunburn. If your sunburn is recent and not blistering or peeling, rubbing a slice of tomato on it can lessen the redness. And studies show that eating tomatoes can increase your skin's natural sun protection.



We hope you've enjoyed reading about tomatoes and how to grow them in your garden4me raised planter - please check our website for further factsheets and information.

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