

TOMATOES

YOU WILL NEED:

- Package of tomato seeds
- 12 oz. paper cups
- Bagged seed starting mix
- Planter pots 12" to 18"
- Potting soil for vegetables
- Stakes about 4 feet tall
- Twine cut into 18-inch strips

COST: about \$30-\$45

CHOOSING A TOMATO SEED:

Small varieties such as cherry or roma may better suit the size constraints of the urban gardener. If you decide to plant a large variety, such as Beefsteak, be sure to use a large container (18" minimum). Determinate or "bush" variety tomatoes are usually recommended for planting in containers. These tend to produce the majority of their fruit in a shorter 2-4 week timeframe (rather than steadily producing all season), but are commonly more compact than the viner indeterminate varieties, which usually require more space and support. If you plant early you could be harvesting tomatoes in June.

MID-MARCH

STARTING THE SEEDS INDOORS:

In the Roanoke-area seeds can be started indoors in mid-March in anticipation of the last frost, which may occur as late as the end of April.

Place a seed in the center of the cup and push it into the soil with your finger, about 1/2 inch. Cover and gently pack with fingers.



Fill a 12 oz. paper cup with about 3 inches of seed starting mix



Add some water. You want enough to keep it moist, but not water logged.



It is recommended that you start about twice as many seeds as you will want full-grown plants.

Place the cups in a warm spot (75-80 degrees) out of the way of pets and children. The seeds should take 10-15 days to germinate. Be sure to check the soil every 2 days to make sure it's still moist to the touch.



Once the seeds begin to sprout, move them to a well-lit windowsill. Rotate them every few days if you notice them bending toward the light. Remember to water regularly.

About 4 weeks after the seedlings sprout (about 2-4 inches tall), they should be ready for transplant into the large containers.



LATE APRIL

TRANSFERRING YOUR PLANTS:

After danger of the last frost has passed it is time to transfer your plants to plastic containers. Choose the plants that appear the strongest for transplant.



Fill pots with soil leaving 2 inches at the top.

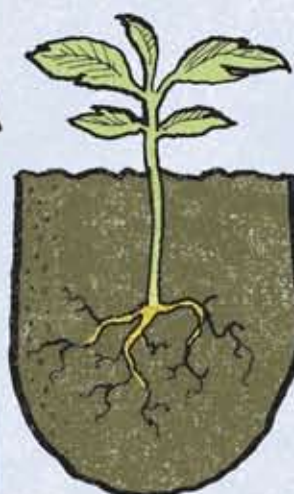
Dig out a fist-sized hole in the center.



Tip the cup and gently slide the plant out and place it into the hole.

Push soil firmly at base of the plant.

Make sure to cover all the roots, burying the stalk up to where the leaves start.



Now is a good time to put in a stake. Place it about 4 inches from the base of the plant and push it all the way down to the bottom of the pot. As it grows taller you'll need to secure the plant to the stake with twine.

Water adequately and place pots in a well-lit outdoor area such as a balcony, terrace, or porch.



MAY / JUNE

PROVIDING DAILY CARE:

When the plants get to be 1 foot tall, loosely tie the base to the stake with twine. This will help keep it upright when it starts to produce heavy fruit. Tie it again every 12 inches as it grows taller.



HARVEST

Remember to water regularly. You should begin to harvest fruit about 2-3 months after planting. With proper care, some varieties will continue to produce fruit until early October. Be sure to pick all unripened fruit before the last frost. Picked fruit can be kept on a windowsill to ripen.

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