



Grow at home: Tomatoes

In a few months' time, you could be picking your own homegrown tomatoes. It's hard to beat the flavour of tomatoes straight from the vine and they're easy to grow if you have a sunny sheltered spot or indoor area.

You will need:

- Seeds
- Compost
- Pots (you can use old yoghurt pots or food containers with holes for drainage) - we've supplied some fibre biodegradable pots to get you started



Getting started

1. Fill your pots up with compost, but not completely to the top.
2. Put two seeds onto the surface spaced about 2/3cm apart, then cover with a thin layer of compost.
3. Water the pots gently so that you don't disturb your newly planted seeds. The pots will let any excess water drain through so it's best to find something to put them on so your windowsill doesn't get too damp. Have a look in your plastic recycling - mushroom trays work.
4. It's good to put a label in each pot with the name of the plant and the date you put the seeds in.
5. Put the pots on a warm sunny windowsill and don't let them dry out.

Tomato seeds usually germinate within 7-14 days. Not every seed will produce a plant. Once the seedlings have grown to about 5cm, you need to decide how many to keep - tomatoes can grow to over a metre tall and each plant needs a separate large container. You now only want one plant in each pot, so remove the smallest to make space for the stronger plant to grow on.

Growing on

While you are looking after your plants you can now start to think about where you will grow them in the warmer months. Tomatoes can be grown outside, but it won't be completely frost free until June. The location you choose should be a warm sunny spot and have space to allow the plants to grow tall.

Soon your plant will need a slightly bigger pot (something around the size of a 1-litre ice-cream tub). If you're upcycling something, always remember to make some drainage holes.

To transplant

1. Half fill the new pot with compost, then:
 - a. If you're using the fibre pots provided, simply place the whole pot on top of the compost.
 - b. If you have used your own pots, hold the pot upside down, place your fingers either side of the plant, tap the base and the plant and roots should drop out. Place this on top of the compost (try to avoid touching the stalk as you could damage the plant).
2. Add more compost until the new pot is full then gently water.

When the weather starts to properly warm up and the days are getting longer, you can plant the tomatoes into their final big pot (1 per plant) or growbag (1 grow bag will support 2 plants). They will also need a support (a bamboo cane works well) - look for one about 1.5m in height and use soft string to loosely tie the stalk to the cane.

Tip: If your plants have grown tall (leggy) in the small pots then transplant them into a deeper hole and fill the compost up the stalk to no further than the first leaves. This will make the plants sturdier.

Your tomato plants will grow sideshoots off the main stem. Pinch them out with your fingers - this will focus the plant's energy on producing fruit rather than lots of leaves. Tomatoes are hungry plants and will need feeding once a week once they start to flower - you can buy tomato feed or make your own from comfrey or seaweed!