

Caring for outdoor tomato plants

If you are planning to grow your tomatoes outside remember that the plants are damaged by frost. So aim to put them out at the end of May or beginning of June when the risk of frost is passed.

Hardening off

Before you put your plants outside you need to harden them off. This means adjusting them to the outside conditions. Cold nights can be quite a shock for plants after the warmth of a cold frame or sunny window sill.

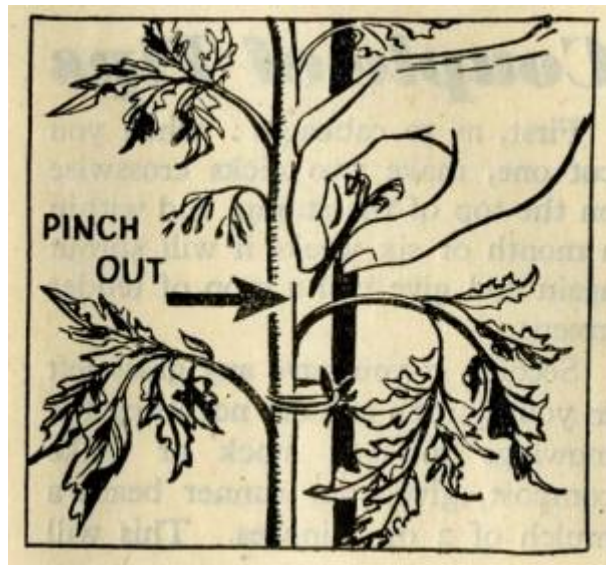
Start hardening off the plants by putting them out for a few hours during the day in a sheltered position such as a patio and then take them in at night. Gradually increase the number of hours the plants are left outside. After about ten days, if the weather hasn't suddenly turned cold, they can be left out all night in a sheltered position.

Positioning

Outdoor tomatoes need to have a sheltered and sunny position in the garden. If you are growing them in pots use larger containers with a depth of at least 10 inches and good quality compost to get the best results and crops.

Tomato care

Standard varieties, or cordons, should be trained up canes. Side shoots form at the joint between the main stem and every leaf. As soon as they start to form, they should be removed carefully when still small, using thumb and finger, so that the plant is trained up the cane with a single main. Removing the side shoots helps to focus the plant's energy on the production of fruit.



Once you have four trusses (these are the flowers which form into fruit) and the bottom truss has started to set fruit, remove the leaves below the lowest truss to allow the air to circulate. Also at this point remove the growing tip above the highest truss so that the plant will put its energy into forming good fruit and less foliage.

'Bush' varieties of tomatoes (such as 'tumbling tomatoes' or many container varieties) don't need any support or their side shoots pinched out.

If you are growing in a pot, feed the plant weekly with a good quality liquid feed when the first truss has set with small fruits.