



TASTY TOMATOES

compiled by Frida Forsberg

PLANTING

Tomatoes need a sunny site and good drainage. They will grow in just about any soil which has been well dug and enriched with **Searles 5IN1 Plus** or a complete fertiliser a couple of weeks before planting. For potted tomatoes, plant in **Searles Herb & Vegetable Premium Potting Mix**.

PLANTING TIP

Ensure seedlings are well anchored by planting them slightly deeper than the surrounding soil — tomato plants can become top-heavy and blow over.

FERTILISING

Tomatoes are not heavy feeders. In fact, high nitrogen fertilisers can cause excessive leaf growth at the expense of fruit yield and flavour. For tasty, long lasting fruit and resistance to pests and disease, apply **Searles Liquid Potash** or **Searles Flourish** fortnightly.

STAKING

Staking tomato plants will help prevent pest and diseases by keeping heavy trusses of fruit off the ground. Larger bushes may need several stakes — train the branches onto the stakes as they grow.

POLLINATION TIP

Tomatoes grown in greenhouses or sheltered positions where there is little wind may benefit from being given a gentle shake to help spread their pollen.

MULCHING

A thick layer of mulch under the plant for the fruit to rest on while ripening is important as fruit in direct contact with the ground tends to go mouldy. A thick mulch around the roots will keep the roots cool and moist, as well as discouraging weeds. This can also help reduce blossom end rot, a disease caused by soil dryout and inconsistent watering.

THE SUN-RIPENING MYTH

Tomatoes will be most flavoursome if they ripen at ideal temperatures — around 23°C. Exposing ripening tomatoes to too much sunlight is likely to cause scalding of the fruit and poor flavour. During



Major Tom stores well and has excellent flavour.



Cherry tomatoes are great for school lunches.



These Roma tomatoes are egg-shaped beauties.



hot weather, it is best to harvest tomatoes when they start to blush and allow them to ripen on a window sill away from direct sunlight.

PRUNING

It's important not to overprune tomatoes, but remove the lateral stems by hand as they grow. This will create better air circulation and reduce fungal problems.

WATERING TIP

Water tomato plants on the roots — not the foliage. This will reduce the risk of fungal infections and will also reduce water lost through evaporation.

OTHER PESTS & DISEASES

Tomatoes can be affected by a soil-borne virus known as 'wilt' which can easily destroy entire crops. Avoid this problem with crop rotation — planting your tomatoes in a different place each year. If wilt persists, grow your tomatoes in large containers. Aphids, caterpillars, mites and fruit flies can also attack tomatoes. These pests can be controlled with pyrethrum insecticide if necessary.

