



The Plant Professionals

## SPRING TOMATOES

444, Celebrity, Carnival, Jackpot, Heatwave, Phoenix, Roma, Solarfire, Sunmaster, Sunpride and Tycoon are all good medium sized tomato varieties. Beefmaster and Betterboy are good larger varieties, and should be planted early. Small Fry, Sweet 100, Santagrape and Cherry Large are smaller tomatoes that produce prolifically, and for a longer time. Patio is a 2" diameter tomato bred for growing in pots.

Prepare planting beds by working 2" – 4" of Back to Nature Compost. Addition of manure is also beneficial. Organic Plant Food or Tomato & Vegetable Food can be rototilled in at this time, or other fertilization methods can be employed later.

Except for cherry-types, tomato plants must bloom and set fruit before night temperatures exceed 75 degrees. Therefore plants should be set out as early as possible, and protected from frost, cold and dry north winds. Alternately transplants can be potted in cut down plastic soft drink bottles or 1-gallon nursery buckets for growing until weather is warmer. Plants are usually safe if set out February 20<sup>th</sup> – March 10<sup>th</sup>, but earlier plantings, protected when necessary, can reward you with a larger harvest.

Transplants should be set 36" apart, with roots covered by no more than 2" of soil; extra leggy plants can be laid sideways in a shallow trench to cover excess stem. A newspaper collar or plastic container with bottom removed can protect the stem at ground level where it might be chewed by cutworms. Water in transplants with Root Stimulator mixed to directions. Organic Plant Food, Tomato & Vegetable Food, Miracle Gro For Tomatoes, and John's Recipe are all good fertilizers. High nitrogen fertilizers such as 21-0-0 ammonium sulfate are excellent for maturing fruit when applied after fruit has set.

Growing plants will need support by caging or staking. Be sure stakes or cages are large enough and securely anchored. Plants can be very lightly mulched with shredded pine bark after planting but mulch should be thickened to 2"- 4" after fruit set. Water deeply and regularly, never allowing the soil to become completely dry.

Insects and disease are more easily prevented than cured. As temperatures warm, weekly application of Insecticidal Soap will stop that #1 nemesis, the spider mite. A Fungicide prevents most common tomato diseases, and Thuricide eliminates pesky caterpillars.