Grow to Give

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A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO GROWING TOMATOES

There's still time to get tomato seeds going and it will be well worth it. There's nothing better than the scent of tomato plant, nor the flavour of a freshly picked tomato! If you plant them in April, you could be harvesting your crop as early as June and it's easier to get hold of seeds than you might think. Do you have any over-ripe tomatoes in your fridge? If you do, you can make your own 'smashed tomato seed tape'! Simply follow the steps below to start growing your own.

1. Place the soft tomatoes between two layers of kitchen roll and squash them with the palm of your hand.
2. Carefully peel back the top layer and remove as much of the flesh as you can. Dry this seed layer on a warm windowsill or radiator, placing it on a plate to protect surfaces.
3. Once dry, carefully cut into sections and sow your seed tape under a layer of fine compost that does NOT have added nutrients. Seeds have their own food store and newly formed roots can be burned by nutrients they do not need.
4. Recycled food trays with drainage hols make ideal seed trays. Water carefully and place in a warm, sunny spot. A south facing window is ideal, but do not let the compost dry out! As the seeds germinate, the paper rots away.
5. Wait until the second serrated shaped leaves appear. Once they do, they are now ready to pot up into a large pot, or be put out in their final position.
6. If you know the variety, plant out dwarf/trailing tomatoes into approximately a 3 litre (19cm diameter) container or hanging basket. For all other varieties, aim for a minimum 7 litre container (25cm diameter, 20cm deep). Grow bags should be made deeper by using open ended pots, which allow you to top up the soil to cover roots that appear in time on the lower stem and water the plants efficiently too.
7. Use a standard peat free compost to pot the plants up and get ready with the tomato feed, which will add the weekly nutrients that tomatoes require to form. Tomatoes are hungry plants and need a good feed once a week, but only once those first flowers set - otherwise you will end up with tall, lanky plants that bear no fruit. Ideally use a feed that has nitrogen for leaf growth, phosphorous for root development and potassium for flowers and fruit.
8. Position your plants in a sheltered sunny spot outdoors or in a greenhouse. If necessary for your variety, support with stakes as they get taller and begin to count down the 7 weeks! They will fly by and in no time at all you'll be harvesting and sharing tomatoes with everyone.

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