

Renfrow Hardware

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The Renfrow's Method of Foolproof Tomato Planting



1. Choose a spot where there will be six to eight hours of “sunbathing”-strength sun daily. Nighttime temperatures need to be warm with the soil feeling warm to your bare legs when you sit on the ground. Waiting until April 15th to plant in our area is *a good rule of a green thumb*.
2. Materials: tomato plant from Renfrow's, organic Plant-tone fertilizer, hydrated lime, shovel, and cage or stake.
3. Dig your hole 8-12 inches deep.
4. Throw a small handful of organic fertilizer and a small handful of hydrated lime into the bottom of the hole.
5. Chop and mix the added materials in the bottom of the hole with some of the same soil you just removed to make the hole.
6. Put a couple of inches of fresh soil on top of the mixture. If the roots directly touch the lime or the fertilizer, the plant may die. The roots must grow down into the mixture.
7. Remove the leaves and side branches from the bottom half to 2/3 of the plant and then set your tomato plant on top of the fresh soil and bury the stem so that 50 to 75% of the height of the plant is buried. We call this “burying the plant up to its neck.” This encourages deeper roots and more sturdy growth while also protecting the plant from drying out as easily.
8. Water the plant well. Fill in the settling soil with additional soil.
9. The plant will visibly grow very little above ground during the first week, but below ground rooting is taking place all along the buried stem.
10. Mulch heavily with old leaves or wheat straw once the plant is 8-12 inches tall.
11. If you stake the plant, drive the six-foot stake in soon after planting to avoid damaging new root growth. Every few days, tie the main stem to the stake with a stretchy tomato tie or soft jute twine or strips of old bed sheet material.

Remember: The #1 killer of tomato plants is the gardener.

He or she usually kills the plants by one of two methods: over-fertilizing or overwatering. The colored powder fertilizers that mix with water can be the double-edged sword to the inexperienced gardener. Water less frequently than you think – one deep watering per week is often sufficient. Try to keep the foliage dry and the soil from splashing onto the plant, as this will discourage diseases from starting and spreading.

12. Caging the tomato is initially more expensive but generally less labor-intensive than staking. Cages last for many years whereas stakes do not. Buy the tallest cage you can afford. Tomato plants grow tall. Up on Renfrow Farms our plants are consistently six feet tall or more.
13. Generally, harvest begins 65-75 days after transplanting.
14. Side-dress the plant with more fertilizer when it has visibly begun to grow rapidly. Organic fertilizer is okay to put directly in the hole. We prefer to not use the powdered fertilizers that are dissolved in water and poured on the plants. We generally think plants should be fed through their roots rather than their leaves.
15. Make multiple, staggered plantings (April 15, May 15, June 15 and July 15) so that you will ensure having young vigorous plants producing heavy yields until the fall frost. Get a head start by planting on March 15 and using “walls of water” to keep your plants warm. Successful gardeners plant successively.
16. Space your plants at least three feet apart in any direction. Spacing four or five feet apart will increase yields because the plants will not be fighting each other for sunlight → photosynthesis → fruit production.
17. Generally pests are not a problem on tomatoes but if you have problems with bugs, squirrels, or neighbors, we will be glad to help you when that arises. Feel free to call the store or bring in a sample leaf or the pesky pest in question.
18. We encourage you to try many different varieties and also suggest that you consider learning to preserve your harvest by canning, drying, juicing, or saucing. We will be delighted to discuss food preservation at length with you in person.