



## **GROWING TOMATOES, PEPPERS, CHILLIES AND AUBERGINES IN THE GREENHOUSE**

1. Sow seeds in February-early March (peppers, chillies, aubergines), late February-early April (tomatoes); they need a temperature in excess of 60F (17C) for germination, so a heated incubator is best. Then you will have to prick them out into small pots and keep them in a light, frost-free environment. Otherwise buy small plants in late April: we sell them at the Hut late March onwards. NOTE: Beware....FROST WILL KILL YOUR YOUNG PLANTS; BRING THEM IN FROM THE GREENHOUSE IF FROSTS ARE FORECAST AND YOU HAVE NO HEATER.

2. Give some thought as to tomato varieties as many older ones and commercially grown ones (e.g. Moneymaker) are grown because they have thick skins and a long shelf life. Excellent flavoured, thin skinned tomatoes include:

‘Ordinary’ tomatoes: Shirley F1 (the trusses can be very long so to stop them breaking with fruit weight, either cut off the end third or tie the tip up to a support), Ferline and Alicante. Try also Black Russian, a dark skinned tomato that tastes fabulous. ‘Beefsteak’ big tomatoes: Brandywine or Marmande. Cherry tomatoes: Gardeners’ Delight, Favorita, Suncherry, Sweet Aperitif.

3. Today few amateurs grow them in soil, instead using containers with sterile, new compost. All these crops can be grown in ‘growbags’, but if you have three plants in a growbag, with its shallow layer of compost, on hot days you may have to water mornings and evenings and the plants may still suffer through lack of water(see below). Instead many of us grow in big pots, tomatoes in 20 litre, peppers, chillies and aubergines in 10 litre.

Compost: most of us use Jack’s Magic, Clover or Sinclair or the compost from Growbags.

4. Most greenhouse tomatoes are ‘indeterminate’ and are grown as a cordon up a strong support, with all sideshoots (which grow from the axillary buds at the joint between base of leaves and main stem) removed. One good way of doing this is to have one or two taut lengths of heavy garden wire running horizontally along the length greenhouse, and having a vertical cane stuck in each pot and tied firmly to the wire(s).

5. Aubergines, peppers etc are allowed to branch as they grow and so not grow as tall as tomatoes. Thus a 2-3 foot cane in each pot will provide enough support if the main shoots are tied in to it. I grow these on staging so that they get more light.

6. Putting young tomato plants in their permanent pots or Growbag: plant them deeper than they have been grown in the small pots, with the strap-shaped seed leaves just on top of the compost. This extra buried bit of stem will produce more ‘surface roots’ which are the roots that take up nutrients, whereas the deeper roots take up most of the water.

7. Feeding: We sell special tomato liquid fertilisers with a high phosphate and potash level. These are ideal for tomatoes, peppers, aubergines, courgettes, marrows, melons, squashes, pumpkins and cucumbers. One tablespoon per gallon of water, or check instructions on the bottle. Feed every other day (some feed daily) from the time that the first flower fades and the first fruit ‘sets’, feeding into the top of the pots.

8. Watering: Putting pots on trays lined with black fleece (see polytunnel) makes the job easier; make sure the fleece is very wet in the morning and it should last 24 hours.

9. Ventilation: On hot sunny days give maximum ventilation (this also lets in the bees).

10. White fly is a real pest: grow some French marigolds and use yellow sticky fly traps.



11. Remove all side shoots from tomatoes BUT let one grow to 4-5" long. Then cut it off and plant it as a cutting in a small pot. Then raise it as your other tomatoes and it will extend your cropping season (in 2015 I had my last tomatoes on such a plant on 8th December).
12. Usually your plants will have their flowers pollinated by insects that visit your greenhouse, but at the beginning of the season bees etc may be scarce. So when the flowers are open, tap the plants so that they shed some pollen from the anthers that might land on the pistil (the entrance to the ovary). You could use a very soft brush to do this.
13. Harvest when ripe and enjoy!
14. What to do with surpluses? Each week when the crops are ripening rapidly I gather a pile of tomatoes, aubergines, peppers together with, from the vegetable plot, onions, garlic and courgettes. I peel where necessary and chop everything into largish chunks, put them in a big pan with some herbs, salt and pepper and a splash of water, and very slowly heat the mass up and then simmer until all is soft. I then bag up this 'ratatouille' (one week's picking gives five or six bags) and they go into the freezer. We still (end March) have several of last year's bags left. Great with meat balls and pasta. You could also make a lovely tomato sauce: Gather a pile of fully ripe tomatoes (the more the better) and with a sharp knife cut out the hard core. Blitz them in a microwave until they are soft and the skin slips off easily. Then put in a big sieve and, using a wooden spoon, sieve the juice into a saucepan. Put seeds etc onto compost bin. Add pepper, a little salt and, if you like bite, a little chilli powder and heat until the consistency you require. Great with a proper cooked breakfast or with burgers.
15. Seeds from uncooked tomatoes (such as ones that have developed blossom-end rot because of poor watering: see above) can survive just about anything; they were commonly found growing on the old sewage works having easily survived the tortuous journey. Composting will not kill them! So if you have a rotten tomato that you want to compost, do as you should do with weeds that have seed heads, thick potato peelings and green potatoes: put them in a bucket with water for a fortnight and that will kill them. I forgot to do this a couple of years ago and the next spring one bed had a mass of useless tomato seedlings, useless because the parents were F1 hybrids.

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