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Tips for propagating tomatoes

Requirements

Tomatoes prefer a sunny, warm, dry and wind-protected spot. Unless they are blight-resistant varieties, the location must be protected from the rain (greenhouse, foil tunnel or tomato house, directly against a house wall).

The plants have a highwater requirement and should be watered regularly and thoroughly. Potted plants require more frequent watering.

To prevent infestation with fungal diseases, make sure that the leaves do not get wet when watering! Tomatoes grow continuously throughout the summer months and constantly produce new leaves, flowers and fruit. They therefore have a high nutrient requirement and should be planted in humus-rich, calcareous soil with a good supply of organic fertiliser and compost and fertilised several times during the season (liquid, tomato fertiliser or nettle and comfrey dips). For good fruit ripening, tomatoes should be given a potassium-rich fertiliser.

Sowing

Do not start sowing until around mid-March, as the tomato seedlings need a lot of light and will otherwise die. If you do not have a sunny location, a plant lamp can also be useful.

Cover the seeds only lightly with the selected substrate in a suitable planting container. A small indoor greenhouse and a heating mat are best suited. Ideal temperatures for growing are approx. 20-25°C. Ensure even humidity without waterlogging. The seeds and seedlings must never dry out completely. The greenhouse with its greenhouse effect ensures that the soil does not dry out too quickly. As soon as the seeds have germinated, you should occasionally remove the lid briefly for ventilation. On the one hand, this hardens the seedlings and, on the other hand, it prevents the dreaded "fall-over disease". This is caused by a fungus that is favoured by a warm and humid climate (so always clean used containers well for the next season!). You should replot the seedlings in their own pots with a diameter of approx. 8 cm as soon as possible. Carefully harden off your tomato seedlings by slowly acclimatising them to sunlight and outside temperatures in a sheltered spot.

Planting

The tomatoes should be planted approx. 60 x 60 cm apart. Add plenty of mature compost and horn meal to the planting pit. The plants are planted deep down to the lowest pair of leaves so that additional roots can form on the main shoot.

Outdoor tomatoes are only planted out after the Ice Saints. Tomatoes can also be grown excellently in pots (at least 10 litre volume). Do not plant tomatoes next to potatoes, as they transmit brown rot and late blight!

Plant care

Tall-growing varieties require a stable support, which is placed next to the root ball when planting. The plant is tied to it at regular intervals. As the plant begins to grow, all lower leaves are removed up to a height of around 20 cm to prevent the plant from being infested with harmful fungal organisms from the soil.

Tomatoes generally need to be pinched out (except for bush and cocktail tomatoes, which grow at least two shoots), i.e. the new shoots that form in the leaf axils are continuously broken out throughout the summer. The purpose of this is to keep the growth habit airy (prevents blight), to strengthen the fruit set on the main shoot and to limit the total number of fruits. Heat-loving varieties in particular ripen better this way. This can also be achieved by topping, where the upper part of the plant is cut off after about the sixth flower. As a preventative measure, the plants can also be sprayed once a week with horsetail broth or a tea made from the husks of garlic or onions, which often significantly increases their resistance. To prevent the fruit from bursting, ensure that the plants are watered evenly and fertilised in a balanced way. The soil should never dry out completely; a mulch cover helps to prevent this.

Harvest

The fully ripened fruit can be harvested continuously from July to the end of October. Care should be taken when picking the ripe individual fruits to avoid damaging the remaining bunches. All tomatoes should be picked before the first frosts. These can be left to ripen indoors, preferably together with apples.

Further information

Tomato plants are not frost-hardy and (unless they are in a greenhouse or plastic film house) must be protected against late frosts (ice saints in mid-May).

They can either be covered with foil (which should be removed during the day when it is sunny) or a foil bag can be put over them; large, transparent bin liners with a capacity of at least 100 litres made of sturdy foil are very suitable for this. The material should be strong enough to form a brim at the bottom (weigh it down with stones) that lies flat on the ground. This frost protection will remain in place even in strong winds. To prevent the heat from building up too much in the bag during the day, cut off a corner at the top. The hole remains open when the sun shines and is closed again in the evening using a clothes peg.

Such measures are not only frost protection, they also ensure a considerable growth advantage. If the fruit set is only moderate despite good flowering, there may be too few pollinating insects around (especially in the greenhouse). Careful shaking of the plant can help to prevent this. Tomatoes are self-fertile, the pollen is released and ensures pollination within the plant.

Seed production

Harvest fully ripe, healthy and varietal fruits from several healthy plants. Cut the tomatoes open crosswise and scrape out the seeds with the pulp or simply squeeze them out. Place in a jar and top up with a little water. Label well. The fermentation process takes two to four days, depending on the temperature. Check and shake daily during this time. When the jelly shell has fermented, the seeds sink to the bottom. As the seeds can germinate without jelly, they must now be processed and cleaned quickly. Finally, the seeds can be rinsed in a sieve under running water.

To dry the seeds, spread them out on a smooth surface/plate. Kitchen paper is not suitable as the seeds will stick to it. After about 14 days, the drying process is complete and the seeds can be placed in a labelled bag.

Store the seeds in a dry, dark and cool place. They remain germinable for at least 5 years.



**Please bring your harvested seeds back to us.
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