

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
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People who do not have space for a garden but still want to enjoy the taste of fresh, sun-ripened tomatoes do not have to be deprived. Tomatoes do very well in pots, baskets or any type of growing container. All you need besides the tomato plant is a good potting soil, a good-sized container and a sunny place. Tomatoes need at least 6-8 hours of sunlight per day. Remember you can move the container to follow the sun. If you have a heavy container, you should think about a stand with rollers on it, so that it is easier to move around. If you decide to use regular garden soil be sure to add some peat moss and some soil mix, so that your soil does not pack down too much. It will also hold water better if it is not too heavy. Also, please note that tomatoes in planters need to be watered more often than those planted in the ground.

If this is your first time planting in containers, try using Sweet 100 or any other cherry patio tomato. This type of tomato will also be easier to stake up and support, as they grow and they will produce well. Give your container tomatoes small amounts of plant food or fertilizer in their water once a week. It is better to do this once a week than to occasionally heavily fertilize.

When your tomatoes bear flowers you can give them a small gentle shake to help pollinate them. Remember that tomatoes ripen from the inside to the outside, so when your tomato is the right color, it is ready to pick and eat. Tomatoes do not need to be placed in a sunny windowsill to get ripe, so if you pick them a little early just set them in a place out of direct sunlight. Do not put your tomatoes in the refrigerator; it causes them to lose their flavor. If you find you have grown too many tomatoes, you can always share with your friends and neighbors. Alternatively, you may freeze them or make sauce or soup. The list is endless. Enjoy!!!

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.
