

By Sandi Pullman

Planting Out

It is important to buy young healthy seedlings especially with vegetables such as tomatoes because ones that have been sitting in the nursery for weeks will have become root bound, tall and lanky due to lack of light. These seedlings will not perform well.

When buying a punnet of tomato seedlings which contains about 6 plants, they need to be about 5cm high with straight stems, lots of leaves, dark green and lush. Avoid plants with leaves that are turning yellow or grey. Also avoid ones that are flowering as this also a sign they are old stock.

If you buy an advanced tomato, usually one per pot, it needs to be about 10cm high and have a good branch structure – that means there are branches evenly distributed up the stem. If the stem is elongated, it is a sign that it has been in the nursery for too long.

I suggest soaking your seedlings in some water with some liquid fertiliser or seaweed tonic to help the delicate plants overcome their transplant shock for a couple of hours. This really works!

It is recommended that you plant the tomato deeply, so that it can establish roots thus making it much firmer in the ground. This helps to stop it falling over and breaking the stem when it is older and laden with fruit. The roots can grow deep down into the soil as long as oxygen is present.

Staking your Tomatoes

Staking your plants is a very personal thing and it also depends on how much space you have. If you have a lot of space, you can let them ramble around which the cherry types like to do. But if you are short of space, staking is one way of controlling the spread and preventing the plant from taking over your garden.

The benefits of staking are that it helps to reduce the presence of pests and diseases, especially as fruit resting on the ground is a magnet to creepy crawlies. If you decide to stake them, put the stake in when you are planting your tomatoes as hammering it in later will damage the plants roots. For large tomatoes like Gross Lisse you will need 2 meter (7foot) tall stakes.

You then need to start nipping out the lateral growth with the tips of your fingers to encourage the tomato to grow tall.

If you are allowing your tomatoes to sprawling, you still may need to stake several of the large lateral branches.

You can use fancy iron stakes or the good old wooden ones. The iron ones may look better but the wooden ones are just as effective. Old stockings are ideal for tying up your tomatoes with, as they don't damage the soft tissue of the plant's stem.

Scotsburns recommends Sandra Pullman's *The Secrets of Growing Tomatoes in Cool/Temperate Areas*. Other tomato growing ebooks are *The Secrets of Growing Tomatoes Successfully for Tropical and Sub-Tropical Areas* and *The Secrets of Growing Tomatoes in Hot Arid Areas*. Each eBook is tailored to the growing conditions of each area. By buying this eBook from www.gardenpatch.com.au you grow the biggest and tastiest tomatoes you have ever grown. Each eBook is packed with lots of helpful information.