

NORTHWEST GARDENING



To successfully grow tomatoes, plant starts where they will get a good six hours of sun. The plants also need plenty of room for air to circulate. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY DIEDOVSTOCK

Learn to Grow Big, Beautiful Tomatoes

Nothing drives vegetable gardeners to distraction like the elusive quest for a ripe crop of tomatoes. There's the fickle weather to consider, diseases to battle and insects to thwart.

"Everyone wants to grow tomatoes," says Amy Jo Detweiler, a horticulturist with Oregon State University's Extension Service. "It's a universal food people tend to like."

Wanting to grow them and actually doing it are two different things.

When shopping for tomatoes for shorter growing seasons, Amy Jo recommends buying those with 60 to 70 days to maturity rather than 70 to 100.

"Some of those are Legend, Early Girl and Siletz, all developed by OSU," she says.

Cherry tomatoes such as Sun Gold, Gold Nugget and Sweet Million ripen early and are a good bet for beginners.

Big, beefsteak types can be challenging.

Tomatoes are either indeterminate or determinate. The former ripens throughout the season, while determinate can be harvested all at once for making such things as sauces and salsas.

In colder climates, growing tomatoes with protection is necessary because of the possibility of frost at any time of year.

If you don't have a greenhouse, use a cloche or row cover. When plants are young, use water rings, found at garden centers. Water rings have channels of water that collect heat during the day and reflect it to plants at night. Covering the soil around plants with plastic sheeting also will help.

Amy Jo offers these tips for growing tomatoes:

- Select sturdy plants.
- Put in a plot that gets a good six hours of sun.
- Plant in well-drained soil that has



For best results, fertilize throughout the season. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY GLEBCHIK

been amended with organic material such as compost or well-rotted manure.

- Pluck off leaves at the bottom of the stem and bury in soil 5 to 10 inches deeper than it came in the pot. Additional roots will form along the stem.

- As the plant grows, remove branches and leaves close to the ground to help prevent soil-borne diseases.

- Give plants plenty of room so air can circulate and sunlight can penetrate. This will result in more vigorous plants that can more easily fight off diseases or pests.

- Use a strong tomato cage or trellis for support.

- Start fertilizing about two weeks after planting with a 5-10-10 or 5-10-5 mixture. Feed according to package directions about every three weeks until fruit ripens.

- Don't wait for soil to dry out completely between waterings. Irrigate deeply every two to three days, more often on particularly hot days.

- On side stems with no blossoms, pinch them off at the V where they meet a main stem. This forces energy to develop the fruit rather than plant foliage. ■

For detailed information and canning recipes, refer to OSU Extension's guide to canning tomatoes and tomato products at <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw300>.



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ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY JENKOATAMAN

Drilling Down: Four Cordless Gifts for Dad

If the dad in your life enjoys home projects, rechargeable tools are an excellent gift idea.

Rechargeable cordless tools are worth the investment when the corded version is inconvenient. For example, a power drill is something you usually move around with and often use outside.

On the other hand, a table saw is usually not the first choice of cordless tools because it doesn't need to be moved repeatedly during a project.

Quality cordless tools are generally less expensive if you buy them as part of a set instead of one at a time. Since each line of tools uses a unique battery, you can't mix and match between brands.

It may cost less in the long run to buy a cordless starter kit with a few helpful tools and a battery, then add tools to the set.

Here are a few cordless tools the father in your family should love.

Power Drill

As one of the most used power tools, a drill should be everyone's first cordless tool. Using a corded drill can mean constantly moving the cord around furniture, other tools or your own feet, which can be dangerous. Cordless drills are easy to use, and the technology has improved so they have more power and hold a charge longer.

Light-duty drills are smaller and less powerful but easy to use for smaller projects.

Leaf Blower

If the father in your family uses a gas-powered leaf blower, you can do him—and your neighbors—a favor by giving him a cordless leaf blower, which is more energy efficient, quieter and less polluting.

String Trimmer

A string trimmer is a quick way to trim weeds and grass near walls, bricks and rocks.

If your family uses an old gas trimmer around the yard, it's time for a change. Two-stroke engines pollute the air and require regular maintenance. Electric trimmers are quieter and more energy efficient. Models range in price from \$50 to \$150. It's worth paying a little more to get a highly rated model that will last longer.

Flashlight

Today's LED flashlights produce up to 20 times as much light as incandescent ones. They come in a variety of options, from tiny keychain lights to headlamps to waterproof spotlights.

A flashlight usually gives better light than a cellphone, especially if you're working in a tight space, such as under a

sink. A flashlight often comes as part of a cordless tool set, or you can buy a single unit that charges using a USB cable.

Batteries

Batteries make cordless tools possible. Lithium-ion batteries are more expensive, but are gaining popularity because they hold a charge longer. They have a longer life, but still degrade over time.

It's worth buying cordless tools from a reputable brand so you can be confident you will be able to find replacement batteries.

It goes without saying, but these cordless tool gift ideas aren't just for dads. All do-it-yourself enthusiasts could put any of these gifts to good use. ■



This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. For more energy tips, go to collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips.