

# Tips to successfully grow tomatoes

Slicing into the first tomato of the season is a much anticipated moment for gardeners. Tomatoes are among the most popular fruit or vegetable plants grown in home gardens.

Much of that popularity may be credited to the fact that red, ripe tomatoes have a delicious, juicy flavor that serves as the basis for all sorts of recipes. And since tomatoes can just as easily be grown in a full backyard garden or in a container on a patio or balcony, tomatoes appeal to gardeners regardless of their living situations.

While tomatoes are relatively easy to grow, they are prone to cer-

tain problems and pests. Knowledge of what to expect when planting tomatoes and how to start off on the right footing can help produce a season's worth of delicious bounty.

- Wait until after the last average frost date. Tomatoes can be grown from seeds outdoors in warm areas, but tomato gardeners often find success starting seeds indoors six to eight weeks before the last frost date. Gradually introduce seedlings to the elements for a few hours each day, increasing the duration of time outside. Then they can be transplanted outdoors when temperatures are consistently over 60 degrees.

- Choose a sunny spot. Tomatoes love to soak up sunlight, according to The Home Depot. Place the plants in a sunny spot so they can thrive.

- Space out plants. The experts at Better Homes and Gardens say to leave anywhere from 24 to 48 inches between plants to accommodate for growth and ensure the plants will not get stunted.

- Plant deeply. Tomatoes tend to root along their stems. If transplants are long and lean, dig a trench and lay the stem sideways in the dirt and then bend the top of the plant upward. Snip off the lower branches and cover with soil up to the first set of leaves. This

will produce extra root growth and stronger, more vital plants.

- Give the plants support. Tomato cages or stakes can help keep the leaves and fruit from touching the ground, which can cause rot and, eventually, death to the tomato plant.

- Lay down a layer of mulch. Tomatoes grow best when the soil is consistently moist. Mulch can help retain moisture from water-



ing and rain. Mulch also will help prevent soil and soilborne diseases from splashing on the leaves and plants when it rains. While you amend the soil, make sure that it drains well and is slightly acidic.

- Prune away suckers.

Tomatoes produce "suckers," which are leaves that shoot out from the main stem. Removing these leaves promotes air circulation and keeps the plant's energy focused on growing fruit.

Tomatoes are a rich addition to any garden. A few simple tricks can help even novice gardeners grow delicious tomatoes.

# Home improvement projects to complete in a weekend

Home improvement projects ramp up when the weather warms up, as homeowners channel the rejuvenating feelings of spring and tackle their home to-do lists. Large-scale renovations can affect a home, but smaller projects can yield impressive results and be completed over the course of a single weekend.

If time is of the essence, these weekend or one-day projects may satisfy homeowners' desires to fix up their homes.

- Create an accent wall. Painting a focal wall in a home can create a serious impact. The bonus is it will not take as long or require

as many materials as painting an entire room. Accent walls frequently feature a bold color, so decide on placement and tackle this project in less than a day.

- Install stair runners. Dress up hardwood stairs with decorative carpet runners. Runners come in elongated pieces of carpeting or individual pieces that can be placed on each step. If carpeting doesn't fit with the home's design, painting individual stair treads also can create visual appeal.

- Dress up the entryway. An entryway is a guest's first impression of a home. Many entryways can use a minor overhaul, both inside and outside. Paint the front door a different color so it pops from the curb. Install a new mailbox or decorative house numbers. A new welcome mat can change the look as well. Inside, consider laying a new floor.

Resilient vinyl tiles come in many different patterns and can

mimic the look of wood, travertine or marble. Installing a floor can take a day or two.

- Install a new faucet. Instantly improve a kitchen or a bathroom with new fixtures. New faucets can provide aesthetic appeal and low-flow faucets can help conserve water.

- Create a gallery on the staircase. Gather and arrange framed photos, artwork or wall accents so that they ascend the wall of a staircase. This creates a designer touch and can dress up an often barren area of wall space.

- Install a fresh light fixture. Improve drab spaces with a little illumination. Better Homes and Gardens suggests replacing an existing fixture with something new and vibrant. If hanging a new fixture is not within one's skill set, table or floor lamps can also cast a new glow on a space.

- Add molding. Molding can add instant aesthetic appeal to a room. Molding is appropriate near the floor, at the top of walls where they meet the ceiling or even mid-wall as a chair rail. Some homeowners like to create framed mold-

ing on walls in living spaces.

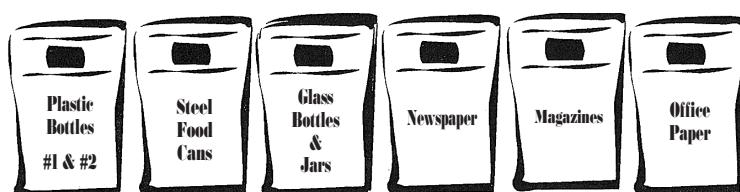
- Update kitchen or bathroom hardware. Replacing hardware is a fast and easy project that can have immediate impact. Swap out tired or outdated hardware for newer

brushed metals and more impactful shapes and designs.

Home renovations do not need to take weeks or months. Many projects can be completed over the course of a weekend.

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