

# LEAP CLUB TOMATO SALE

## Tomato Husbandry Tips

Tomatoes like sun and need at least 6 to 8 hours of sun per day. If your situation lacks this sun, consider growing the cherry varieties that will still ripen. Tomatoes have a unique ability to grow roots from the stem, so experienced gardeners pinch off the two bottom leaves of the seedling. After removing the plant from the pot, check if the roots have wrapped around and gently tease out these roots to encourage them to branch out laterally. Dig the hole deep enough to bury the plant 1 to 2 inches below its old soil line. That part of the newly buried stem will send out more roots, speeding growth. **DO NOT BURY NON-TOMATO SEEDLINGS BELOW THEIR ROOT LINE, AS IT MAY KILL THEM.**

These plants were all started with added spores of beneficial fungi called mycorrhizal fungi. Although the individual hyphae are not visible to the unaided eye, the hyphae form 'ropes' and appear as white filaments. The plant will give these symbiotic organisms up to 20% of the sugar the tomato produces, and the fungi will bring back nitrogen, phosphorous, and water from surrounding soil.

The potting soil amendments also include some charcoal called biochar, blended with worm compost and full of nutrients, symbiotic fungi, minerals, and beneficial bacteria.

We do **not** recommend spading or rototilling your garden, which destroys the symbiotic fungi and causes soil carbon to oxidize into carbon dioxide. Just dig a hole and plant the tomatoes, about 30 to 36 inches apart. By not disturbing the rest of the soil, the existing structure and microorganisms remain and improve the soil's health. To prevent weeds, cover the ground with 5 to 7 sheets of wet newspaper and then cover that paper with about 3 inches of compost. Punch a hole through the compost and paper to plant the tomato. The damp paper will compost in time but prevent the emergence of weeds and provide ideal conditions for worm growth. The worms will do the rest, aerating the soil. We also recommend companion crops, including carrots, parsley, cilantro, garlic, and low-height herbs such as thyme. These companion plants will attract beneficial insects, help feed the beneficial fungi and shade the soil.

**Biochar** is charcoal intended for soil amendment and widely documented by peer-reviewed science to increase yields by >15% of tomatoes and other veg, plus improve resistance to dry periods and pests, but is not widely available. Mark and Laurie Mann, cofounders of American Biochar will be at the plant sale with their product and have generously offered to donate all profits from sales to the LEAP Schools. Go to <https://ambiochar.com/> for more information.

Tomato plants need a trellis to hold up their branches and heavy loads of fruit. There are lots of, but you must have a trellis or growing framework, preferably 6 feet tall. Feel free to stop by 8 East Third Street to see the type of support used by the grower of these plants. Note that a few tomato plants are 'determinate,' meaning they grow about 3 feet tall and set all their fruit at once. Determinate plants benefit from staking but can grow without stakes. Most tomato plants are 'indeterminate' and reach upwards of 6 to 8 feet if given support. Without support, they sprawl widely, as much as 6 to 10 feet from the plant. Sprawling tomato plants produce lots of green leaves, but tomatoes, not so much.

Pruning will increase tomato yield. Watch for shoots growing laterally from the base of the plant (which will sprawl) and prune them before they grow, or if you missed, prune them as soon as you can. Yes, these branches will flower and set tomatoes but will not get much sun, lay on the ground, and reduce the production from the vertical stems. Prune each plant to no more than three upright stems. After

mid-August, start nipping the growing tips at the top of the plants, forcing the plant to concentrate on filling out the tomatoes already set.

Do not let the plants dry out. The value of covering the ground with wet newspaper and compost is not just for weed control but also for preserving the moisture and encouraging worms, whose burrows capture water from rains, watering, and then enable roots to recover this moisture during dry periods.

Consider fronting your tomato plants with basil plants. The basil flowers attract pollinators and enhance the flavor of tomato salads and sandwiches. The garlic is said to ward off some harmful insects (not settled science) and adds another excellent edible.

Feel free to stop by 8 East Third Street with questions or comments. Tom and Judy are often in the garden and are happy to discuss gardening. Feel free to email [tr9casten@gmail.com](mailto:tr9casten@gmail.com), or call 630-321-1095 to speak to Tom or Judy.

Thanks in advance for your orders and contributions to the LEAP Schools serving South African Townships.

**The Hinsdale Central LEAP Club.**