



Finney Farm

www.finneyfarm.org

TOMATOES!

Frequently Asked Questions

Are Finney Farm Tomatoes organic? Yes! We use organic seed and make our own potting soil from coconut fiber, perlite, and our own compost.

What is the difference between determinate and indeterminate?

Determinate tomatoes are bred to bear all of their fruit at once and then die. They need little if any staking or pruning, and are popular with commercial growers. Indeterminate tomatoes have more of a vining growth pattern, do require staking, and also do better with pruning in this climate. They produce fruit during the whole season until a fall killing frost. We only grow indeterminate varieties at Finney Farm. We prefer them for several reasons, but the primary reason is that we love to enjoy our favorite varieties fresh for months rather than a week.

I keep hearing about hybrids and open pollinated varieties...what does it all mean? In a very basic sense, hybrids result from the crossing of two different parent varieties. To be sold as a hybrid plant, it must be a first generation cross which means that if you save the seed, it probably won't breed true because the genetics aren't stabilized. People grow them because they are bred for desirable traits. We don't grow them because we want to save the seed ourselves. Open pollinated tomatoes are self-pollinating (male and female flower parts on the same plant) so they don't need to be kept separate from other varieties if you want to save the seed, and they will breed true.

What is an heirloom variety? The genetic diversity of the world's food crops is eroding at an unprecedented and accelerating rate. Each variety is genetically unique and has developed resistance to the diseases and pests with which it evolved—growing heirloom tomato varieties in Skagit County for 100 years would result in some resistance to blight, which is not true of a variety traditionally grown in the Southwest where selecting for drought resistance would be important. For commercial farmers today, it's all about getting the biggest yield out of every acre of corn, while using many outside inputs -- such as insecticides and chemical fertilizer. Most commercial farmers have little genetic diversity in their production, and many use seeds from companies like Monsanto who genetically engineer or modify and patent seeds—this is fraught with many negative outcomes. This website has many links to info about this type of farming http://www.youcouldsavetheworld.com/fight_for_natural_food.html Finney Farm uses only heirloom seeds to preserve and encourage genetic diversity.



Any growing instructions or advice for tomatoes? If you want to keep them in pots, they would much prefer to be in something larger—a five gallon bucket with a few holes punched in the bottom would work fine. However, they love to be in the ground and in this climate also prefer some sort of cover. It's wonderful if you have access to a greenhouse but if not, you can grow them outdoors (you'll probably just lose a couple of weeks of production in October). Although we generally prefer not to use plastic, they do love a layer of black plastic laid around the plants as mulch.

They need staking—an easy way to provide support would be use a metal fence post (also called a T Post) and just tie the plant to it as it grows. You can also use a heavy length of bamboo, a tall tomato cage, or provide support from the top down. We have a greenhouse as well as outdoor beds, and we tie a piece of heavy twine from supports about 7 or 8 feet high and connect the other end to the base of the plant, winding the plant around the twine as it grows. If you happen to have some old pantyhose lying about, cut up the legs and use the strips to attach the tomato to the supports—tomatoes grow quickly and it's easy to get twine supports too tight but pantyhose will stretch as the plant grows.



They also like pruning—perhaps a bit less fruit but much healthier and larger tomatoes. In this climate it's also good to prune for airflow which helps prevent blight. There are many videos and articles about tomato pruning online, and if you need some additional assistance or instruction you're welcome to email us!

We don't use any chemical fertilizers—we add a good scoop of compost when planting but our primary fertilizing method is with a nice compost/manure tea. We like to foliar feed as it addresses the immediate needs of the growing crop (for long term soil care we use cover crops etc). Plants absorb foliar sprays up to 20 times faster than soil applied nutrients. We make the foliar feed tea in a 50 gallon tank—but for home use you can put a shovel full of compost and or/composted manure in an old pillowcase. Tie it, place in a five gallon bucket, and fill with water. Can add a small handful of granulated kelp and/or bat guano if you'd like. Let it steep for a week or so, squeeze the pillowcase into the bucket, and you're good to go. We use a sprayer but you can also use a sprinkle watering can. Foliar feed in the early morning or evening when the leaves' pores are open—early morning is best as evenings can sometimes promote powdery mildew.

We generally try not to water directly on the tomato foliage as it encourages blight. We water around the base of the plant only.

Question? Photos or information to share? Contact us at

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