



Getting Dirty Garden Guide 104 Tomatoes

Tomato Growing Checklist for Zone 5 (Wisconsin) 🍅

1. Choosing Your Tomato Varieties



Determinate (Bush-type, good for containers or small spaces)

- Best for shorter growing seasons
- Produces fruit all at once (great for preserving!)
- Examples: *Roma*, *Celebrity*, *Bush Early Girl*



Indeterminate (Vining, keeps producing all season)

- Needs staking or caging for support
- Great for fresh eating throughout summer
- Examples: *Brandywine*, *Cherokee Purple*, *Sungold*, *Big Beef*

2. What to Look for When Buying Tomato Plants at a Garden Center 🌿



Stocky, Sturdy Stems – Avoid tall, leggy plants; look for strong, thick stems (~ pencil-thickness)



Healthy Green Leaves – No yellowing, brown spots, or curling



No Flowers or Fruit Yet – Younger plants without flowers will establish better in your garden



Check for Pests – Look under leaves for aphids, spider mites, or whiteflies



Root Health – If possible, gently check the bottom of the pot; roots should be white and not circling too much (root-bound plants may struggle to grow)



Avoid Plants with Signs of Disease – Black spots, powdery mildew, or mushy stems can mean trouble



Choose the Right Variety for Your Space – Double-check if it's determinate or indeterminate based on your garden needs

3. When & Where to Plant



Start Seeds Indoors 6–8 weeks before the last frost (late March–early April)



Harden Off Seedlings before transplanting (gradually introduce them to outdoor temps)



Plant Outside After the danger of frost has passed (mid-to-late May)

- ✓ **Full Sun** Location (at least 6-8 hours of direct sunlight)
- ✓ **Well-Draining, Rich Soil** With compost or aged manure added

4. How to Plant Tomatoes Correctly

- ✓ **Dig a Deep Hole or Trench** Tomatoes grow roots along the buried stem!
- ✓ **Remove the Lower Leaves** (More on this below 📌)
- ✓ **Bury 2/3 of the Stem** To encourage strong root development
- ✓ **Water Well After Planting** To settle the soil
- ✓ **Mulch** With straw or shredded leaves to retain moisture and prevent disease

5. Why Remove the Lower Leaves?

- ✓ **Prevents Disease** (Lower leaves can touch the soil and pick up fungal issues like blight)
- ✓ **Encourages Stronger Roots** (Since you're burying part of the stem, it reduces unnecessary foliage)
- ✓ **Improves Airflow** Around the base, reducing the chance of mold/mildew

6. Supporting Your Tomato Plants

- ✓ **Cages** – Great for determinate tomatoes, easy to use. I like the Better Bilt Vine Spine Trellis system which is hurricane proof. Check with your local garden center on availability .
- ✓ **Stakes & Tying** – For indeterminate varieties, use sturdy stakes (at least 5-6 feet tall) and tie the plant with soft ties or twine
- ✓ **Florida Weave** – A method using twine woven between stakes, good for multiple plants in a row
- ✓ **Trellises or Fencing** – Works well for vining indeterminate types
- ✓ **Plastic clips**-I love using these clips because they snap on easily and secure the stem to the support system without damaging the stem of the plant. You can also remove them each fall and reuse them the following season or simply recycle them and use new clips next season.