

My tomato plants have been planted outdoors for about ten days now and they are thriving. In fact, the 'Bloody Butcher' tomato already has marble sized fruit. I always plant fairly late, when the night temperatures will be above fifty degrees---a requirement for tomatoes. Early planting of tomatoes is never a good idea. Resist the temptation. The same goes for other vegetables of tropical origin, such as peppers and cucumbers.



The garden soil at my house is all clay. I have a smallish new "raised bed" garden that has good soil. That garden has peppers, onions, rhubarb, raspberries, garlic, basil, cilantro and a few other plants. I grow the tomatoes in pots---they take a lot of room so that works best for me---I have quite a few. Over the years I have tried

various types of soil in the pots and this year I am again trying something different. Some of the soil mixes that I have tried were rather light. Plants grew well enough, but when they matured (over 7' tall) and were laden with fruit, they got top heavy and the wind blew them down a few times. The plants didn't like that and neither did I. This year I am trying two different soil mixes, Dr. Earth Premium Planting Mix and Dr. Earth Vegetable Garden Planting Mix. These heavier mixes are recommended as garden soil additives, not for pots, so we'll see how they turn out. I use one bag of soil mix for a fifteen gallon pot, the size I like for one tomato plant. They are quite heavy so I don't think they'll blow over.

I like to try different fertilizers, too. It's tough to monitor fertilizer results because every year is so different. Weather, plant varieties, soil, and other variables---they all make a difference, so it's hard to judge what caused your results. This year I'll be trying three different tomato fertilizers. Two are granular---Dr. Earth and Mater Magic. The third is a liquid---Algoflash. All are organic. I like fertilizers that have added calcium---experts say calcium reduces the chance for blossom end rot (BER). All three of these fertilizers have added calcium. Adding calcium doesn't guarantee your plants won't get BER, but it should be less likely. Some varieties are more prone to this problem than others. Generally, soil mixes that are meant for containers have fewer nutrients than garden soil, so fertilizing is important if you are growing in pots. Find a fertilizer that works for your situation, and make sure you use it.

As usual, this year I am growing many different kinds of tomatoes (twenty-one varieties) and seven kinds of peppers. Some I have grown before, but most are new to my garden. There are so many kinds to try from around the world that I can't understand the gardener who grows the same thing every year. As you can see in the photo, my tomatoes have large cages. I have been using these for years---I like the large size, and the fact that they fold flat for easy storage. But even with these tall cages I usually have to prune the plants when they extend beyond the cage by a foot or so. This is especially true of the large fruited types. I put cages on my pepper plants, too. I use the "peony cages" that are just the right height. Without support, pepper plants can easily break off in strong wind---especially later on when they carry some heavy fruit.