



**Some folks have asked me** about the tomato plants at my own home so I have decided to share some information about my personal experiences so far this year. I used to grow my plants directly in the ground, and I always had pretty good results. But we moved to a different house a few years ago, and the soil at the new place is almost all clay. Plus, due to the peculiarities of the lot, there was very little space for growing a garden. The only real option was to grow in containers. This is my fourth summer of container culture and I feel very comfortable with it. I have some plants growing in a bagged potting mix, but most of the plants are growing in decomposed leaf compost, a product we sell by the bushel or yard. It is considerably heavier than the bagged mix, and I like the additional weight because my plants get top heavy later on and they are in a very windy spot. I planted about half of my plants on May 26. The extended weather report looked favorable at that time, so I thought I was safe. We then had a number of nights that were still in the 40's, which had me worried. The plants weren't adversely affected, but they didn't grow much (if at all) during that time. I planted the second half of the plants on June 5---I then had about 25 plants. Even after that date, we still had a few nights that were cool, but the plants began to grow and flower. Right now the biggest plants are just over 45" tall. I plan to apply the second dose of fertilizer soon. I will take some more photos when the fruits begin to ripen.



We have talked about some of the more severe problems that can affect tomato plants. Today's subject is of concern, but not of the critical nature. The tomato hornworm is an interesting pest, but it can do a fair amount of damage if you aren't paying attention to your plants. If you have noticed any large moths in recent weeks, you may experience the hornworm problem soon. The large moths are sometimes called Hawk Moths or Sphinx Moths. They are brownish in color. These moths lay their



eggs singly and unobtrusively, often on the undersides of leaves. A short time later the caterpillar emerges and begins feasting on your plants. The damage usually occurs on the softer, upper growth of the plant. It is easy to see because these worms have a voracious appetite, especially as they get larger. You will also see the conspicuous worm droppings (known as frass), which are dark brown or black. Once you see the droppings, you know you should start to look for the "worm." It's color is very similar to that of the tomato stem, so it is well concealed. The creature will have diagonal white lines on its side, along with some dots. It usually has a dark "horn" on their rump---some people erroneously believe the horn is on the beast's head. A mature hornworm will be about the size of your little finger. You can pick them off and dispose of them if you aren't bothered by that sort of thing. You can also use bacillus insecticide dust, which is a biological control. If you find one worm, there are surely more, so keep on searching. You may see another interesting phenomenon while in this pursuit. I have seen it only once. A certain wasp sometimes lays its white eggs in clusters on the backs of hornworms. When the young hatch, they will feed on the hornworm---quite a large meal. There is plenty more information, including pictures, on the internet---just type in "tomato hornworm."