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Milaeger's

Tomato Plant Supports and Fertility

After my blog on the start of the tomato season, I received some inquiries about growing tomatoes, and other vegetables, in pots. I wrote a "how-to" blog on that subject some years ago, so I don't want to rewrite it, but [here's a link](#) to it if you are interested. One of the main questions was about container size. I use a fifteen gallon pot for one regular sized tomato plant. I like to use a heavy soil so the pot doesn't easily blow over once the plant gets large and top heavy. Most vine (indeterminate) tomato plants will grow to about six feet tall, so with that much height plus the weight of the fruit, it's good to have a heavy pot. If you're growing really short tomatoes, say under 30" tall, you could probably get by with a ten gallon pot.



tomatoes planted May 25th

An increasing number of gardeners don't want to hassle with huge tomato plants, even though they are the most productive. They want to grow their



tomatoes June 10th

tomatoes in pots that can be easily managed. We recognized this trend some years ago. In the tomato department at Milaeger's, we have a special section devoted to shorter growing varieties. Included in this area are both bush (determinate) and vine (indeterminate) varieties. The shortest is only about a foot tall, and you certainly don't need a fifteen gallon pot for that one—probably a five gallon is plenty. But anything over 36"

tall needs a large pot. Included in the "container friendly" group are many well-known types such as 'Husky Cherry,' 'Patio,' 'Bush Early Girl,' 'Juliet,' 'Fourth of July,' and 'Wisconsin 55.' There are about 25 kinds in this group with 'Wisconsin 55' being the tallest at around 48".

Taller tomato plants need some type of support. For large tomato plants (say, 6' tall or more), you need big cages, the ones with the heaviest gauge metal. Anything less results in frustration. Those cages are relatively expensive, but worth it. They should last a lifetime. If in doubt, just buy one and see how you like it compared to lesser cages. You will become a believer. We have two types of large cages, round and square. The square one collapses for easy storage, but you



Husky Cherry Red

can also nest the round ones if you have a number of them, so they take up less space. All are lightweight, so you could store them on the rafters in your garage, or even hang them on some longer nails on your garage wall. These extra strong cages would make a great Father's Day gift. That would be a pleasant departure from the typical gifts.



**largest round,
heavy duty tomato cage**

all eggplant should be caged. They usually stay under 30" tall or so, so a peony ring works fine.

Other vegetables can also be grown in pots. In a fifteen gallon pot, you could plant at least five pepper plants—they don't mind being crowded. I like to cage peppers too, because a good wind can snap the stems. Eggplant is also good in pots. A ten gallon pot or larger is required for most varieties. Eggplant are quite beautiful plants and could easily be grown for their ornamental value. Some types have spines on their leaves, adding to their interest. The large fruited types should definitely be caged, and I really think

There are other methods of plant support besides cages. The most common is staking. You need at least a 1" diameter wooden stake, and the large fruited tomatoes require two stakes. Fasten the main tomato stem loosely to the stake; you don't want it binding, or cutting into the stem. I like the foam covered wire fasteners. If you don't like stakes, there are other home-made options. Just search "home-made tomato cages."



foam covered wire fasteners

My own tomato plants were looking a little tired about a week after they were planted. That is, their color was "off." Some of the

plants were yellow-green instead of the rich green that they had only a week earlier. I gave them each a dose of granular fertilizer—this time I used



Jobe's Organic Tomato and Vegetable Food. I'm sure the Espoma brand would have been just as good. They both have a similar analysis and both have added calcium. I gave them some liquid Algoplus Tomato Food too. The liquid is quicker acting. A few days later, the plants were back to their original color. After about two and a half weeks, they have tripled in size, and most are blooming. Onward!