

Home Grown Tomatoes

The tomato (*Lycopersicon lycopersicum*) is a short-lived perennial that we treat as an annual. It originated in the Andean region of South America and was later domesticated in Mexico and Central America. During the early 16th century, it was introduced to Europe, eventually spreading around the world and developing into region-specific varieties.

Vine-like **Indeterminate** varieties require training and support and can reach 10 feet or more. Low growing side shoots on these can be cut back to promote fruit production and to make the plants more accessible for grooming. During late summer, it might also be a good idea to tip them back in order to limit their height, or you will need a strong support system and an orchard ladder for harvesting.

Determinate varieties were developed primarily for large-scale field production and mechanical harvesting. Their bushy form makes them ideal for small spaces and containers.

Perhaps the most debatable subject among home tomato growers is *when* to plant. The optimum temperature for seed germination is 85°F. Night temperatures below 50°F will cause tissue damage and result in an increase in flower abortion. Root growth at these lower temperatures ceases, but many pathogenic fungi thrive, resulting in a high rate of disease. Our

best selection of varieties generally peaks sometime in May. Don't let your friends and neighbors make you feel bad about waiting until now to plant! With a higher sun and warmer soil, your plants will get off to a better start.

Remember that tomatoes need full sun in order to set flowers and a warm location for ripening. Also, it is important to rotate to a different planting location each year, over a three-year cycle. Add compost or an organic Tomato & Vegetable food to the soil. Plant the seedlings deep, covering 2 or 3 inches of stem. Visit your plants regularly but don't overwater. Generally, a deep watering only once a week is plenty, and don't worry about some wilting during daytime heat.

So, is it worth growing your own? At the many produce and farmers markets around the Bay Area, you'll undoubtedly find a decent selection of organic, vine-ripened, heirloom tomatoes by the end of August. But consider that a household of four can be well-supplied by just four (not 12) tomato plants. We'd love to sell more, and some of you might have acreage in rural environs. But the fact is that many of our customers buy too many plants; the plants become crowded, diseases spread, and they generally don't perform well. Stick with one or two of your favorites, and try a couple of new ones. — Paul



Hours: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. No entry after 4:50 pm. Closed Thursdays
510-526-4704 • berkeleyhort.com • mail@berkeleyhort.com

WEEKEND SPECIALS

May 7-9

Sun Shrubs

All varieties/sizes ~ 25% OFF

May 14-16

E.B. Stone Organic Fertilizers

4 lb. box ~ \$8.75 (reg. 11.99)

May 21-23

Glazed Pottery

All sizes/colors ~ 25% OFF

May 28-30

Fox Farm Planting Mix

1 cu. ft. sack ~ \$14.75 (reg. 19.99)

June 4-6

Marigolds

Jumbo 6-packs ~ \$5.00 (reg. 6.95)

June 11-13

Hand Tools

Cultivators, weeders, etc. ~ 20% OFF

June 18-20

Roses

All sizes ~ 30% OFF

June 25-27

Watering Cans

All styles ~ 25% OFF

LIMITED TO STOCK ON HAND.
NO DELIVERIES ON SALE MERCHANDISE.

Thinkin' of Summer

Graduations, vacations, and backyard barbecues might actually be a thing this year! But before you start planting your summer veggies, take a few moments to prepare for later on. That warmer and drier part of summer is the time when you will reap the benefits of spring planning.

Apropos to this month's cover article, I'd like to share an all-too-common nutrient problem that can plague Bay Area gardeners. Tomatoes and cucurbits (squashes, cucumbers, melons) need ample CALCIUM for proper fruit development, and now is the best time to make sure you're covered. Every year around July, we see a steady stream of customers holding deformed fruits with a soft, brownish indentation on the flower end; Blossom End Rot (BER). You can add calcium to the soil now, or use a foliar spray later, but neither of these is as important as keeping the soil steadily moist but not wet. BER is most common early in the season as plants are rapidly growing, and it also seems to be more of a problem on *paste* tomato varieties.

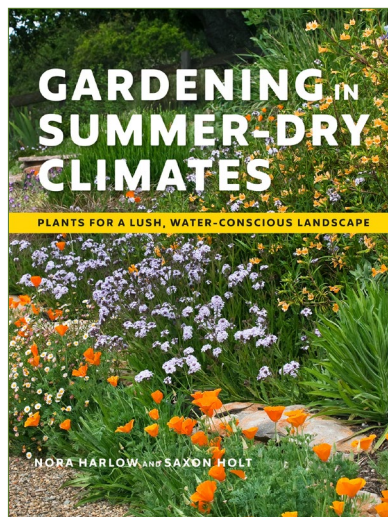
Things you can do now to minimize BER are to set up an automatic watering system to avoid fluctuations in soil moisture, mulch the soil surface, and avoid high nitrogen fertilizers. Later in the summer it is OK to allow your plants to dry-out a little, which may even enhance flavor, but for now give them some extra TLC in order to avoid unnecessary stress.

When planting, consider adding natural ingredients such as composted egg shells, bone meal, lime, or oak leaf mold. And for post-planting, an excellent topical treatment available in our store is **Bonide Tomato & Blossom Spray**, which can be applied directly to the leaves of your plants.

We like to remind gardeners of the importance of not only selecting the right varieties, but of proper spacing and irrigating. Far and away the most popular homegrown produce are tomatoes, and if you are like most urban gardeners, you'll be tempted to try your luck with a few plants grown in pots. No problem with this, just make sure that you choose DETERMINATE varieties, otherwise your plants will outgrow their containers by July. And, when planting larger varieties in the ground, take time to rig up a support system before your plants are 6 feet tall.

Gardening in Summer-Dry Climates

We were slightly panicky when we learned that two classic plant-selection references had gone out of print: East Bay MUD's *Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates of the San Francisco Bay Area* (2004), and the venerable *Sunset Western Garden Book**. Fortunately, the authors of EBMUD's book, Nora Harlow and Saxon Holt, have come to the rescue, publishing a new, expanded guide entitled ***Gardening in Summer-Dry Climates: Plants for a Lush Water-Conscious Landscape*** (Timber Press, 2020).



Their book includes a directory of climate-suitable plants, as well as chapters discussing water management, living with wildfire, gardening practices to promote carbon capture, plants for especially challenging (hot, dry, windy) sites, and descriptions of the Pacific coast's nine summer-dry climate zones. Highly recommended!

Gardening in Summer-Dry Climates: Softcover, \$29.95.
For sale in the breezeway bookcase.

**The Sunset Western Garden Book* is as near to a bible as a gardening book could possibly be. However, its current publisher (a division of Time, Inc., last we heard) appears to have no plans to reprint or revise it. —Margaret

THE GARDENER'S CALENDAR

May Checklist

- › It's safe to plant warm-season veggies in the Bay Area now.
- › Loosen or remove stakes from trees planted in winter.
- › Select succulents now.
- › Support or cage tomato plants early.
- › Deadhead and groom geraniums for longer flowering.

June Checklist

- › Prune fruit trees for a dwarfing effect.
- › Check your automatic watering systems for leaks.
- › Finish planting summer veggies.
- › Aquatic plants look best now, and are in good supply.
- › Feed ornamental grasses with an organic all-purpose fertilizer.

NEW ARRIVALS

Hydrangea macrophylla

Whether mophead or lacecap, there's no beating around this bush — they are definitely not drought tolerant. But maybe you have a shady spot that stays moist, and you want quick growth and enormous flowers for cutting. During May and June, their selection peaks here at the nursery. Over 30 varieties.

#5 size cans \$59.95

Hemerocallis hybrid

One of our most versatile perennials is the Daylily. Although an individual flower lasts only one day, the buds on each raceme open in succession for many weeks during summer. The flower buds are edible to humans, but deer don't seem to eat them ...go figure.

#1 size cans \$14.95 and up

Roses

It was nice letting our growers handle the roses in the early (rainy) part of the growing season. And now the roses are here, and they are spectacular! Shrubs, ground covers, climbers, and Hybrid Tea varieties; they are all either in bud or bloom. Find them below the wall next to our CA Natives. Just look for the rosarian with clippers and gloves.

#3 size cans \$59.95

Alstroemeria hybrids

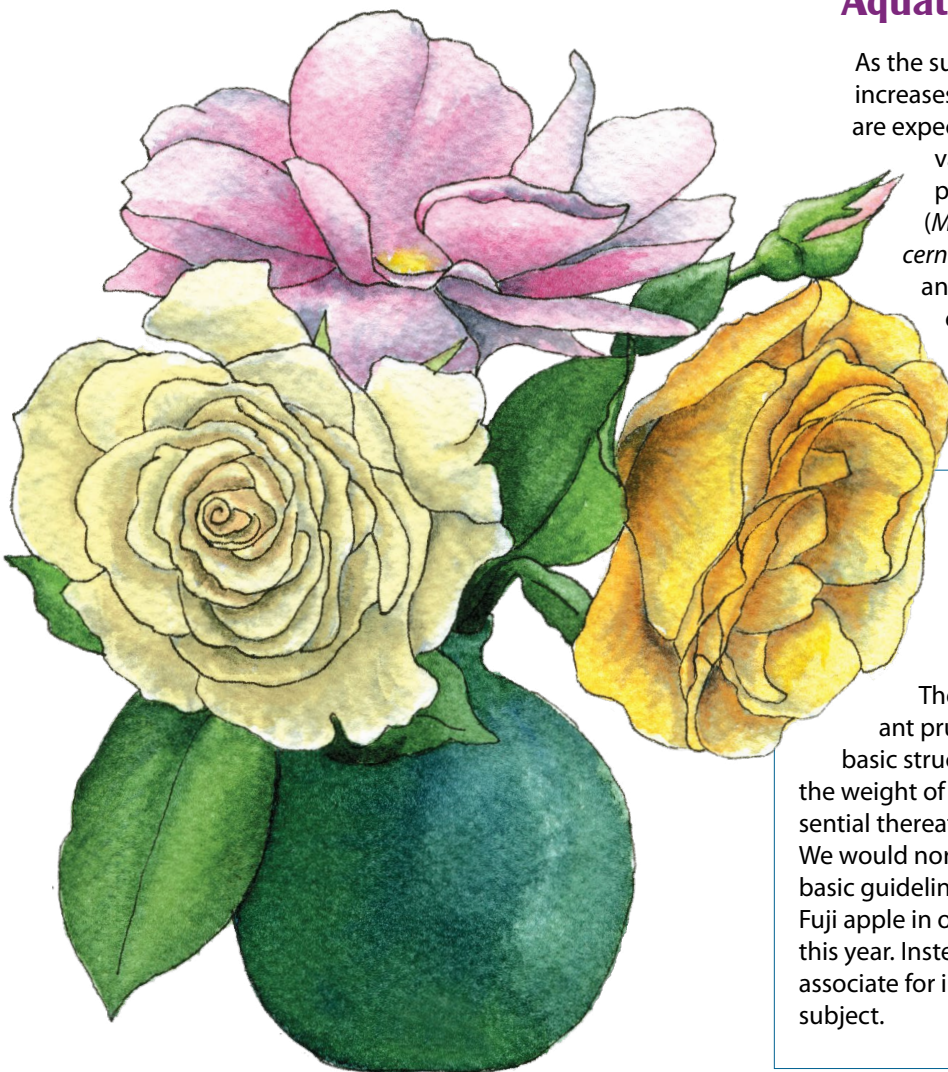
As cut flowers, these Peruvian Lilies are the best, lasting for up to two weeks in a vase. Garden culture is easy, and they are blooming now...so it's a great time to select your favorite color. They come in tall deciduous forms, or lower-growing evergreen types.

#1 size cans \$19.95 and up

Aquatic Plants

As the sun creeps higher, our selection of water plants increases. Lotus (*Nelumbo sp.*) and Papyrus (*Cyperus sp.*) are expected to arrive in May. Also expected is a wider variety of aquatic and bog plants in quart-size pots, including favorites such as Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum sp.*), Fiber Optic Grass (*Scirpus cernuus*), Japanese Sweet Flag (*Acorus gramineus*), and Rain Lilies (*Zephyranthes candida*.) Bog plants, especially in quart-size pots, are particularly well suited for water bowls and patio ponds.

Quart-size pots \$10.95 and up



Summer Pruning of Fruit Trees

The early training of a fruit tree is the most important pruning you will ever do. These cuts establish the basic structural framework of a tree so that it can support the weight of its ripening fruit. **Summer pruning** is also essential thereafter to keep the size of fruit trees under control. We would normally be holding a workshop to discuss the basic guidelines and demonstrate pruning on the established Fuji apple in our front display garden. But alas, no workshop this year. Instead, on your next visit to the nursery, ask a sales associate for instructions, and take home a handout on this subject.

Hand Pollinating Cucurbits

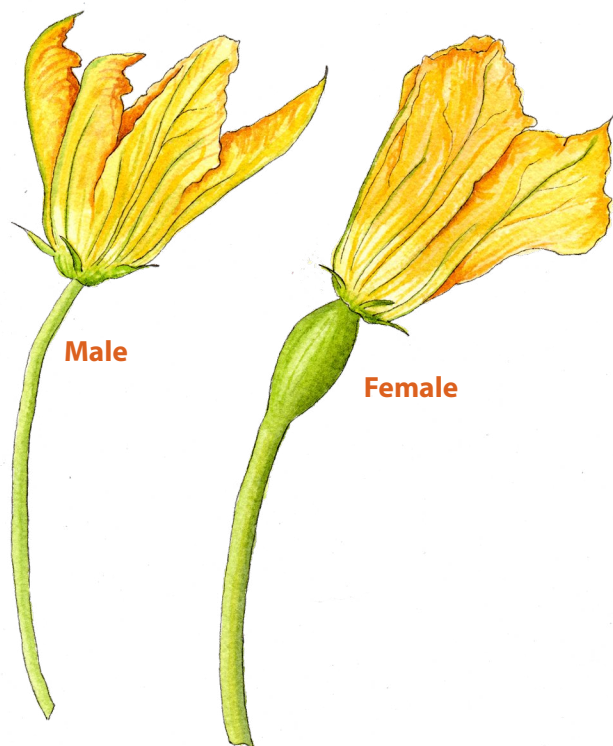
Sometimes customers report that they have lovely lush squash or cucumber plants, but they get a small harvest. They say that small fruits form, but then they rot and fall off.

The problem is one of pollination. The 'small fruits' are really just ovaries that will not form real fruits until they are pollinated. The ovaries are present under the female flowers and will only turn into fruit if the pollen from a male flower pollinates them. This pollen can come from a male flower on the same plant or from any other male flower of a plant in the Cucurbit family. (The Cucurbit family includes cucumbers, zucchinis, summer squash, winter squash, pumpkins and melons.) All it takes is a bee or another insect to roll around in a male flower and then do the same in the female flower.

Sometimes, because of cultural conditions, your plant won't produce male and female flowers that are open at the same time. Or maybe you only want to grow one plant, or you don't have the right pollinators in your garden. Don't despair. You can have a hand in this pollination business. First, identify the male and female flowers (*see illustration below*).

Second, pick a male flower and gently rub the center of it on the centre of a female flower or flowers. You can use one male to pollinate a few females. Remember, it can be from any plant in the Cucurbit family. Third, take the used male flower to the kitchen and stuff with ricotta cheese, bread it and pan fry. But seriously, if you are going to make stuffed squash blossoms use the male flowers so you don't reduce your harvest of fruits.

Now you know how to have a record Cucurbit harvest this year.



Vegetable Seedling Spacing

One of the questions we are most often asked is, "How far apart should I plant these vegetable seedlings?" There is a range of answers to that question, mostly based on the way you plan to harvest your plants. If you plan to regularly harvest outside leaves as the plant continues to mature, you can plant them a bit closer together. If the plant is a compact or dwarf variety, you can also fit a few more in your row. If your soil is not rich or well-amended, plant them further apart. Check plant tags and seed packets for additional information.

Here are some general guidelines:

Year-round crops

Broccoli, cauliflower, kale, collards	12 to 18 inches apart
Chicory, Radicchio, endive	6 to 8 inches apart
Lettuce	8 to 12 inches apart
Spinach	12 inches apart
Swiss Chard	8 inches apart

Warm season crops

Beans	2-3 inches apart
Eggplants	18 inches apart
Melons	24 to 36 inches apart
Peppers + Chiles	12 to 18 inches apart
Peas	2-3 inches apart
Tomatoes — <i>determinate or dwarf</i>	3 feet apart
Tomatoes — <i>indeterminate</i>	4 feet apart
Pumpkins	4 feet apart
Winter squash	3 feet apart
Zucchini + Summer squash	3 feet apart

Looking Ahead

Compared to the slow, tedious year of 2020, this first half of 2021 seems to have flown by. We are extremely grateful for the loyal support from seasoned shoppers and those who are coming to the nursery for the first time!

In 2022, we will be celebrating our 100th anniversary. It is a huge milestone for us. Not only is it a time to be thankful that the nursery has stayed in the family, with the 4th generation now running it, but it will be a time to celebrate with you, our loyal customers. There will be giveaways, music, food, and speakers. We are busy planning many events, so stay tuned for future news. You can follow us on Facebook or Instagram and check out our website.

Happy Planting! — Jeanne