

OSU EXTENSION NEWS

# Growing great tomatoes

**W**ith tomatoes being one of the most popular garden vegetables, now is a good time to look at some key factors that will help you grow great tomatoes.

Since tomatoes are already up and growing let's focus on staking, fertilization, and watering.

Staking or using cages for tomatoes is critical. Research shows that caged and staked plants produce the highest yields and the largest tomatoes. Plants left on the ground tend to have high amount of fruit rot and foliar leaf diseases.

When using a cage make sure it is at least 15" in diameter and no less than 30" tall.

Always base fertilization on current soil test. Ideally, soil test need to be conducted at least every three years. Watch the amount of nitrogen; too much creates large plants and no fruit. Phosphorus is the nutrient that is essential in the formation of flowering and fruit set. A good source of phosphorus is bone meal which can be found at any local garden center. A good fertilization program with proper timing will get those tomatoes producing. Start with 2 table-

spoons of 10-20-10 per plant when the earliest fruits are 1/3 of size. Fertilize again with 2 tablespoons of 10-20-10 per plant when the first fruits are ripe. The last application is 2 tablespoons of 10-20-10 per plant one month after the second fertilization.

Water is a key element in growing great tomatoes. Maintain good soil moisture, without water logging the soil. Adding organic matter and mulch will help in retaining soil moisture and will also provide good weed control. Be sure and water every 3 or 4 days in the summer, with the



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plants getting at least 1" of water per week. When possible use either a drip irrigation system or a soaker hose to water in the garden, this will keep the foliage dry and prevent foliar diseases. And of course the best time to water is either in the morning or late afternoon.

Next week we will look at pest control for tomatoes and some harvest tips. Until then happy gardening!