



Expert tomato guidance

Dreaming of a BLT made with vine-ripened tomatoes from your garden? Or how about colorful cherry tomatoes garnishing your summer salads? America's plant doctors, members of the American Phytopathological Society, offer guidance for growing terrific tomatoes.

• Buy healthy tomato transplants to avoid disease and plant them in a sunny garden site. Water your plants as required by local soil conditions. Practice crop rotation by flipping the garden site each year.

These important practices can ensure a healthy and bountiful crop, Thomas Zitter, plant doctor

and research scientist at a society member said. Tomatoes can be infected by a number of different blights (early, late, and Septoria leaf blight) that limit the quality and abundance of foliage or sometimes totally destroy the plant. To banish blights, follow these tips from the society:

• Inspect transplants and purchase healthy plants. Select wilt and nematode resistant varieties. Look for the capital letters V, F, and N following the cultivar name. • Choose a range of varieties that mature at different times. The earlier the tomato matures, the more susceptible it is to early blight.

• Practice crop rotation by planting tomatoes and other vegetables in a different spot in the garden every year. Do not plant tomatoes and potatoes next to each other since they both are susceptible to early and late blight. • Allow adequate spacing between plants. Remember, they grow pretty big late in the summer.

• Water only at the base of the plant and early in the day. Long periods of moisture on foliage encourage blight. • Stake plants and remove suckers to increase air movement through the plant and to reduce moisture on the foliage. Staking also improves fruit quality and helps prevent soil rots.

• Mulch to keep plants evenly moist, to minimize watering, weeding and cultivation and to reduce blossom end rot. • Monitor the leaves, especially lower ones, for the first symptoms of tomato blight. Remove infected leaves and begin application of a labeled fungicide.

• Remove all plant debris from the garden in the fall. Many tomato blight organisms overwinter on dried plant tissues. The American Phytopathological Society is a professional scientific organization of 5,000 members dedicated to the study of plant diseases and their control. For more information, visit the society's web site: <http://www.scisoc.org>

Coping with those garden volunteers

By LEE REICH
FOR AP SPECIAL FEATURES

Every year you should expect some volunteers in your garden. But before you start watching out for carloads of helpers to pull into your driveway, let me tell you that the volunteers to which I am referring are plants, not people.

"Volunteer" plants are annual plants that regrow every year by themselves, saving you the trouble of planting them.

And where do these volunteers come from? Most originate from seeds ripened and dropped on the soil last fall and winter. The herbs dill and borage are notorious for this habit - plant them just once and never again.

Annual flowers that self-sow include alyssum, calendula, cornflower, cleome, cosmos, California poppy, morning glory, petunia, nicotiana and moss rose.

You will find self-sowing seedlings of any of these plants coming up this year, usually near where they grew last year.

Other volunteers come from the compost pile. You might unknowingly spread seeds when you spread compost over your garden. The heat of composting can destroy many seeds - thankfully, because otherwise the garden would be overrun with unwanted plants.

But not all compost piles heat thoroughly or adequately. And any seeds that can tolerate the heat of composting and often appear even where well-cooked compost is spread.

Sunflower, melon, squash and pumpkin seeds are large enough to be able to burst forth from a cool compost pile's innards, or grow wherever the compost is spread. Occasionally, these plants will appear where an overlooked fruit settled on the ground the previous season.

If you want to encourage volunteers such as tomatoes, sunflowers and dill, don't be overly meticulous in your gardening. If you have hard-to-weed because it's young and green, there

will be no plants left to sow seeds.

Covering the whole garden with a 3-inch blanket of leaf mulch often means that small-seeded volunteers will use up their energy reserves before the seedlings ever reach light. Over-meticulous weeding is another habit that eliminates some potentially valuable volunteers.

On the other hand, you cannot give volunteers free reign in the garden.

A weed has been defined as "a plant out of place," and there is a fine line between a welcome volunteer and an unwelcome trespasser. An exuberant pumpkin vine is out of place in a bed of carrots. If 25 tomato plants pop up in a couple of square feet of space, most are - almost by definition - weeds.

Garlic chives is a plant that is tasty and attractive, but be careful: it can easily overtake a spot of garden. The plant self-seeds prolifically and is hard to weed because of its slippery, straplike

leaves.

Nature makes the choices when it comes to volunteer plants. With volunteers, there is never a fear that seeds have germinated too early in the spring. And you can rest assured that wherever volunteers appear, they have found suitable conditions with respect to sun and soil. Of course, volunteer plants may not show up where you want them.

Unfortunately, most garden plants cannot be relied upon to perpetuate themselves by volunteering. Corn, for example, is ineffective at self-sowing because as soon as the kernels from a fallen cob germinate, they tangle together and crowd each other out. One of the corn's probable ancestors, teosinte, does disperse its ripe seeds - but we humans prefer to bite into a cob full of intact kernels.

Nonetheless, among those plants that do self-sow, let some capable volunteers "work" in your garden.

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Windows fill most of the rear wall of this comfortable, bright and lofty informal liv-

ing area. On one end, it connects to the kitchen. At the opposite end, there's a fireplace with bookshelves on one side and an entertainment center on the other. The butler's pantry is a sink with room enough beneath for a small refrigerator.

The large kitchen is expanded by a bright nook. At center is a work island. Other notable features include: a large walk-in pantry, built-in phone desk with shelves, and plenty of storage space.

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and a bathroom with raised spa tub, oversized shower and twin vanities. Both secondary bedrooms have walk-in closets and private baths.

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