

veggies

Dreaming of that elusive perfect tomato? Keep working at it

The perfect tomato may elude even the most careful gardener because of the quirky behavior of America's No.1 favorite. But experts contend that perfection is not beyond reach, provided the gardener is willing to give tomato plants careful attention.

The six basic requirements for growing tomatoes are:

- A continuous and uniform water supply. Too much water can drown plant roots, especially if they are in heavy soil. Too little water can stop tomato production.
- A continuous supply of nutrients. While the daily requirements are small, the nutrients must be available when the plant needs them. Following the directions on the package or bottle is vital.
- Air in the soil after drainage. The soil must be loose and friable to permit good drainage.
- Sunlight. The tomato should have eight hours of continuous sunlight. They

can get along on less but probably won't produce as well.

- Temperature. Most tomato plants need night temperatures between 55 and 75 degrees to set fruit. There are some varieties that will set at lower and higher temperatures.

- Protection of leaves and roots. Leaves and roots should be protected from temperature extremes, strong winds, birds and animals, weeds, pests and diseases.

Can I improve fruit set?

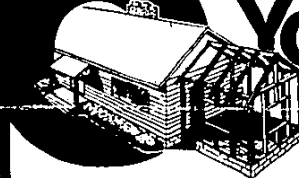
This involves the shedding of pollen, which happens most abundantly on bright sunny days between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. When flower cluster are near the top of the plant, tapping or jarring the entire plant may be effective. To increase pollination from top to bottom, individual flower clusters should be jarred daily with

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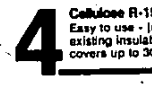
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