



TOMATO VINES left to sprawl on the ground generally produce more fruit than the staked varieties. But staking has other advantages. It keeps the fruit clean and uses less space.

Time to consider your tomato crop

Tomatoes are still the most popular home garden vegetable grown in America, and for good reason. The home-grown product is far superior in flavor and quality to those usually found in stores -- and there are so many ways to use them.

They don't take much space, and they're not fussy about soil, but they do like a sunny location. Also, they

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home & garden

Garden chatter

One of the most common diseases to afflict seedlings is called "damping-off," a fungus disease which causes seedlings to wilt, shrivel up and die.

It is most prevalent indoors when common garden soil is used to start seedlings, or dirty containers. Best way to avoid "damping-off" is to use clean containers for starting seedlings, and to use a sterile packaged seed starting medium. When starting seedlings indoors, it's also important to prevent the seedlings stretching towards the light.

An aluminum foil reflector placed behind the seedlings will help provide even lighting, and it may be necessary to keep turning the containers so the seedlings grow straight.

The most common disease with zinnias is mildew, a powdery white fungus which discolors the foliage in summer. Certain kinds of zinnias are mildew-resistant, and it's a good policy to check descriptions to find those varieties which are claimed to be resistant.

There are also fungicidal sprays and dusts which can be used on zinnias to keep the disease in check. Another deterrent is to change the location of zinnia plantings when buying fertilizer for your garden you will see a set of three numbers used, such as 10-20-20 or some other combination. These numbers indicate the percentage content of the three most important plant nutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in that order.

If you have a garden with poor or exhausted soil it is generally a good idea to obtain a soil analysis from your local state university to find out the nutrients it lacks, then buy a fertilizer that gives you the correct percentages to put your soil back in balance.

One of the most important jobs when starting a new garden is soil preparation. Deep digging is essential, plus the removal of stones and weed roots.

A soil conditioner may also be necessary, such as garden peat, manure or compost. Only when you have a good crumbly well-drained soil can you expect worthwhile results, and create the best possible conditions for good fertilizers and good plants to do their job.

Pressing plants rewarding hobby

Native vegetation that is pressed and mounted can be a rewarding and attractive hobby.

Begin by making a plant press from one to two-inch strips of 1/4-inch plywood, say Michigan State University horticulturist. Eight to 12 strips of wood are needed for each side of the press. Standard size for a press is 13 by 18 inches.

First make a frame and then nail or screw the strips one to two inches apart running both ways, on the inside of the frame. Repeat the process to make the other half of the press. To hold the press together attach two canvas, web or leather belts around the outside.

When collecting plants be sure to include the roots, stems, leaves, and flowers and seeds if present. Plants with flowers are most desirable.

If collecting trees, shrubs or other woody plants include a twig or small branch with 10 to 20 leaves, bark and flowers, fruits or seeds.

Press the plants the same day you collect them. If this is not possible, keep the plants in a plastic bag in a refrigerator. They will last this way overnight or for a few days at most.

Before pressing, remove all the soil from the roots and some of the stems, leaves, flowers, branches or roots if needed to prevent crowding. Straighten and smooth the plant and place it between a folded single newspaper page. Now it is ready to be placed in the press.

Place dryers, made from building felt, blotter paper or corrugated cardboard, between each specimen. Change the dryers and newspaper daily for three or four days -- longer for thick, leafy, or succulent plants. Plants can be removed from the press in seven to 10 days but keep them in the newspaper until you are ready to mount them.

If dried correctly and quickly, the plants will retain most of their natural color. If

Tree-base garden, a colorful touch

Many suburban houses have a large bare expanse of lawn with a solitary tree standing in the middle. In a situation like that it doesn't take much to transform the scene into a colorful centerpiece.

A simple flower bed created from rough natural boulders and planted in the middle with flowering annuals lends a charming touch.

Where the tree is tall, allowing plenty of sunlight under the base, petunias, dwarf marigolds, 'salvias', pansies and geraniums would make a colorful bed.

In more shady conditions some shade loving annuals should be considered such as impatiens, coleus, begonias and vinca.

Instead of boulders, a raised bed like this could be constructed from railroad ties or bricks. A raised bed is generally better than a sunken bed under trees because shallow tree roots often obstruct the proper growth of plants, and deep spading to create adequate room can result in damage to the tree.

To a house - proud homeowner this kind of idea can make the difference between looking like everyone else on the block and showing a little imagination.



ATTRACTIVE raised bed will allow shade-loving annuals to grow under trees.

Private phone for teens

A telephone booth for teenagers' privacy can be framed of 2 by 4 - inch western wood, and enclosed with board-paneling under a second floor or basement stairway.

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