



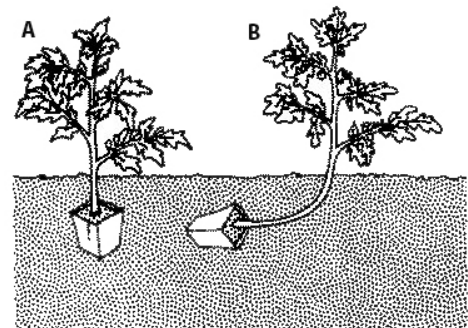
# Planting Instructions

Loudoun County Master Gardeners Plant Sale

Thank you for purchasing from the Loudoun County Master Gardeners! Your support enables our volunteers to serve the people of Loudoun County.

It may be too early to plant tomatoes, peppers, and tender herbs outside! Please follow these instructions for a successful garden.

1. Keep your plant inside in a warm, sunny location until it can be planted outside. It has been receiving 16 hours of artificial light each day, so place it under a light or put it in a sunny window.
2. Wait until after the last frost to plant outside. The average last frost date in this area is usually between April 30 and May 15. Do not plant outside prior to last frost. If overnight temperatures are forecast to be below 45 degrees, cover your tender plants outside with a bed sheet or similar. Low temperatures will stress plants and inhibit growth. Don't plant too early, it is better to wait a week or two.
3. Choose your site - tomatoes and peppers need a sunny location, that receives at least 6 hours of full sun and has well-drained soil. To protect from soil-borne disease, rotate your crops: do not put the same type of plant in the same location as last year. If growing in a container, select at least a 5-gallon pot. Bigger is better. Consider using a "self-watering" planter to prevent the plant from drying out too quickly.
4. Prepare the soil while you are waiting for the last frost date to pass. Tomatoes and peppers grow well in organic matter consisting of topsoil (not potting soil) mixed with compost in the top 6 inches. Both can be purchased if you don't have viable garden soil.
5. Harden off the plant by getting it acclimated to the outdoors a week before planting outside. Place it in a sun-filtered location for an increasing number of hours each day and bring inside at night. Outside, set it near a building or other structure that will provide a wind break. Light breezes will strengthen the stalk, but intense winds may break tender plants. Carefully monitor plants for signs of wilting. Exposure to the sun and wind quickly dries the soil in a pot. If wilted, provide fresh water, and move the plant to a shady location until it revives. Toward the end of the week, move it into morning sun and leave out at night if temperatures are over 50 degrees.
6. Plan for plenty of space as overcrowding causes weak growth and possible insect and disease problems. Tomatoes and peppers should be planted at least 2 feet apart for staked plants and 3 feet apart for caged plants.
7. Plant tomatoes in a wide hole deep enough to submerge a few of the leaves underground leaving 2 or 3 sets of true leaves above ground (see diagram). Be careful not to snap the stem planting this way. The stems buried underground will root. Press soil firmly down around plant.
8. Plant peppers and herbs in a wide hole deep enough to place plant at the same depth it was in the pot (no deeper.) Press soil firmly down around plant.



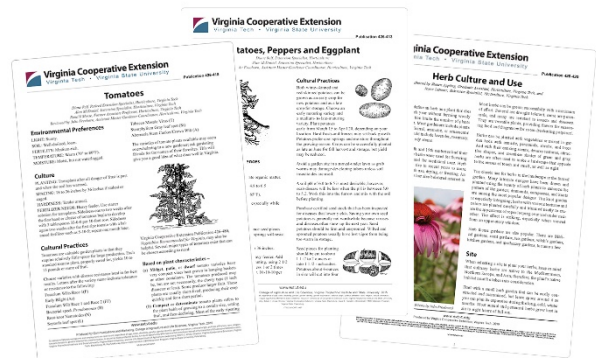
*Plant tomatoes slightly deeper than they were originally growing (A). If plants are leggy, set them as shown (B).  
Diagram courtesy tamu.edu.*

9. Pinch off flowers to encourage strong roots and plant development.
10. Water well to secure soil and encourage root development. Use about a pint of water with starter fertilizer solution for each plant.
11. Provide support for tomatoes and peppers to help support the weight of fruit to keep stems from splitting or breaking. Use wooden stakes with ties, wire cages, trellises, or fences. Supports are best installed at the time of planting.
12. Mulch plants a month after planting when as soil is warmer. Apply 2 inches of mulch around plant - away from the stem - to keep the ground from drying out between waterings and to keep soil borne diseases from splashing onto foliage.
13. Feed with a balanced fertilizer solution with an N-P-K ratio of no greater than 5-10-5 once a month. We recommend an organic fish emulsion with kelp.
14. Water plants with an inch of water a week. Do not over water. Use a rain gauge to measure rain fall. Water in the morning so plants have time to dry before the cool evening when fungus infection is most likely. Water the soil, not the leaves. Container plants dry out more quickly. Check them every day. On hot days, containers that were watered in the morning may need more water later in the day.
15. Watch for signs of insects or disease, such as discolored or curling leaves, holes in leaves or fruit, or deposits on leaves or fruit.
16. Call us! If you have any questions during your growing season, please contact our Help Desk by submitting your questions at [www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org/gardening-advice/help-desk](http://www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org/gardening-advice/help-desk).

## For more information

Visit [loudouncountymastergardeners.org/events/plant-sales](http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/events/plant-sales) for additional details about vegetable gardening, tomatoes, peppers, and herbs.

The Virginia Cooperative Extension website at [resources.ext.vt.edu](http://resources.ext.vt.edu) has a wide variety of gardening information available for review and/or download.



Excerpted from Spring 2015 LCMG Trumpet Vine article by Barb Bailey, Loudoun County Master Gardener, and VCE Publication 426-418, authored by Diane Relf, Retired Extension Specialist, Horticulture, Virginia Tech; Alan McDaniel, former Extension Specialist, Horticulture, Virginia Tech; and Ronald D. Morse, Associate Professor, Horticulture, Virginia Tech. Revisions: 2016, W. Hiller; 2021, D. Holz.



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