Del Norte Triplicate

COMMUNITY

It’s Tomato Time!

By Deborah Holloway September 3, 2026

Oh, how I love fresh garden tomatoes. And now they are here, available at our stores and farmer’s markets. Big and small, and in so many bright colors. Even though growing tomatoes in our climate is a challenge, it can be done! I will include a few tips so when it is time to plant in the spring you all will have some ideas and pointers.

When growing from seedlings, as most of us do, and especially if you don’t have a greenhouse, be sure to plant well after the last frost. Plant 2 feet apart, and plant deep -much deeper than other flowers and vegetables. Tomatoes love full sun and acidic soil. They prefer a ph of 5.8 - 6.2. They are heavy feeders so use a fertilizer and/or compost. After your plants are a few feet high and blooming, remove a few bottom branches once per week. This will get rid of unproductive suckers and keep diseases at bay. It also makes fruits easier to see! You can also keep flowering/fruiting clusters to 3 or 4, which will make for more uniformity. Keep the area around your plants clean. Use a sturdy tomato cage. Don’t go for the flimsy types! Pick your tomatoes when they are still on the green side, and let them finish ripening indoors.

Here are some varieties that are best for our shorter, cooler growing season. I am not including the big beefsteak tomatoes because they need more time. Sungold and Sweet Million are very good cherry varieties, and are readily available. Brandywine, Novia, Black Beauty, Aurora, Northern Exposure and Black Prince are good medium-sized reliable beauties. I also want to add my favorite, a striped variety called Green Zebra which is a well-balanced refreshing tomato that looks beautiful on the plate.

Speaking of plates, what is your favorite tomato recipe? Salsa? Jam? Sauce? Ketchup? Mine is Margarita Pizza. Pre-heat your oven to 450. Brush your pizza dough with a good quality olive oil. Sprinkle with garlic salt. Add a thin layer of shredded mozzarella and parmesan cheese. Add ¼” thick slices of a variety of colored tomatoes. Bake approximately 15 minutes. Slice fresh basil into small ribbons and sprinkle on top. I love fresh basil (dry is no good for this!) so I let it rain. I also like a pinch of red pepper flakes. This is so simple and so delightful. You’ll never want Margherita Pizza with sauce again. Enjoy!