

Tomato Seeds

In a nutshell

- 1 Grow healthy plants** – choose a variety you love and give them plenty of sun
- 2 Know your flowers** – most tomatoes self-pollinate, so seeds stay true to type
- 3 Pick ripe fruit** – wait until they're fully coloured and ready to eat
- 4 Clean the seeds** – rinse for small batches or ferment for larger ones
- 5 Store well** – dry fully, label, and keep cool, dark, and dry

A NOTE

Growing

Tomatoes love warmth, sunshine, and good soil. Grow them just as you would for eating – strong, healthy plants make the best seeds.

There are two main types: bush or determinate tomatoes (shorter, with most of the fruit ripening at once) and cordon or indeterminate tomatoes (tall, keep producing over longer periods of time). Either works for seed saving.

To keep them “true to type”, grow plants of the same variety together. Six plants is ideal, but fewer will do. Remove any plants that look sickly or produce odd-shaped fruit – this keeps your seed stock strong.

Pollination

Most tomatoes pollinate themselves before the flower even opens, so varieties won't usually mix – you can grow different kinds side by side.

A few – like currant tomatoes, potato-leaf types, and beefsteaks with “double flowers” – can cross-pollinate. This is because the stamen protrudes from the flower, so it can be accessed by insects. If you grow these and want to be sure they are true to type, stick to one variety at a time or cover flowers with a mesh bag until they set fruit.

Harvesting & Cleaning

Wait until fruit is fully ripe before taking seeds – the riper, the better. If frost or wet weather is coming, you can pick slightly under-ripe and finish ripening indoors.

For small batches, scoop seeds out, rinse in a sieve under cold water, and rub gently to remove the jelly. Spread on a plate or kitchen paper to dry.

For larger batches, try fermentation: squeeze pulp into a container, leave 3–4 days in a warm spot until mould forms, then top up with water, stir, and pour off the floating bits. Repeat until only clean seeds remain. Spread to dry quickly, away from heat and sunlight.

Storing

Once completely dry, pop seeds into a labelled paper envelope or jar. Keep somewhere cool, dark, and dry – a tin with silica gel works well.

Tomato seeds can last up to six years, but the fresher they are, the better they'll germinate.

Even if your seeds are older than six years, don't be afraid to give them a try – you never know what might sprout, and you could be bringing a treasured heirloom variety back to life.