



FROM THE FILES OF THE DIRT DIVA DIARIES

## 📅 Zone-by-Zone Tomato Planting Calendar

A companion to *Ripe Rewards: A Beginner's Guide to Growing Epic Tomatoes* · Based on USDA Hardiness Zones 3-11 · [DirtDivaDiaries.com](http://DirtDivaDiaries.com)

**How to read this calendar:** Find your zone in the left column. Follow your row across the months to see exactly when to start seeds indoors, begin hardening off, transplant outdoors, and when to expect your first ripe tomatoes. All dates assume average last frost dates — **always check your local forecast!** For a free personalized planting report for your exact area, visit [DirtDivaDiaries.com](http://DirtDivaDiaries.com).

**LEGEND:** 🟦 Start Seeds Indoors 🟨 Hardening Off (1-2 weeks outdoors) 🟩 Transplant Outdoors 🟪 Expected Harvest Window 🟤 Too Hot / Frost Risk / Rest Period

ZONE & REGION	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
<b>Zone 3</b> MN, ND, SD, MT (north), Canada border			Start Seeds	Indoors	Harden Off	Transplant Early June	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Frost	Frost	Frost
<b>Zone 4</b> ME, VT, NH, WI, MI (north), CO (mtn)		Late Feb Seeds	Indoors	Indoors	Harden Off	Transplant Early June	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Frost	Frost	Frost
<b>Zone 5</b> NY, PA, OH, IN, IL, IA, NE, CO (mid)		Late Feb Seeds	Indoors	Harden Off	Transplant Mid-May	Harvest Begins	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Frost	Frost	Frost
<b>Zone 6</b> VA, KY, MO, KS, NM (mid), OR (coast)		Early Feb Seeds	Indoors	Harden Off	Transplant Early May	Harvest Begins	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Frost	Frost	Frost
<b>Zone 7</b> NC, TN, AR, OK, TX (north), WA (coast)	Late Jan Seeds	Indoors	Harden Off	Transplant Mid-April	Harvest Begins	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Last Harvest	Frost	Frost
<b>Zone 8</b> GA, AL, MS, LA (north), TX (central), CA (inland)	Dec/Jan Seeds	Harden Off	Transplant Late Mar	Harvest Begins	Harvest	Harvest	Peak Heat Rest	Peak Heat Rest	Fall Crop Seeds	Fall Transplant	Fall Harvest	Start Seeds
<b>Zone 9</b> FL (north), TX (south), AZ (mid), CA (central valley)	Harden Off	Transplant Late Feb	Harvest Begins	Harvest	Harvest	Peak Heat	Peak Heat	Peak Heat	Fall Crop Seeds	Fall Transplant	Fall Harvest	Start Seeds
<b>Zone 10</b> FL (south), CA (San Diego), HI (coast), TX (deep south)	Transplant Jan	Harvest Begins	Harvest	Harvest	Heat Stress	Too Hot	Too Hot	Too Hot	Fall Crop Seeds	Fall Transplant	Fall Harvest	Start Seeds
<b>Zone 11</b> HI (low elev.), Puerto Rico, southernmost FL	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest	Avoid Hottest	Avoid Hottest	Avoid Hottest	Avoid Hottest	Plant Outdoors	Harvest	Harvest	Harvest

### ✦ Find Your Zone

Don't know your zone? Enter your zip code at [planthardiness.ars.usda.gov](http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov) or visit [DirtDivaDiaries.com](http://DirtDivaDiaries.com) to get your free personalized growing report — including your exact zone, frost dates, and local tips.

### ✦ Hardening Off Is Non-Negotiable

Those 1-2 weeks of gradually introducing seedlings to the outside world? **Do not skip this step.** Start with 1-2 hours outside in a sheltered spot, increase daily. Seedlings that skip hardening off will go into transplant shock — don't do it to them!

### ⚠️ Zones 8-11: Two-Season Growers!

In warmer zones, summer peak heat is **too hot for tomatoes** — plants stop setting fruit above ~95°F. Use this natural break to rest the soil, then start a **fall crop** that often outperforms spring. Your neighbors up north are jealous!

Grow Your Own Way!



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## Zone Planting Details & Growing Tips · Page 2

Key dates, special notes & strategies for each zone · Companion to Ripe Rewards · DirtDivaDiaries.com

### ☁ Zone 3 — Very Short Season

🌱 Seeds: March \* Harden: Late May 🌱 Transplant: Early June 🍅 Harvest: July-Sept

**Last Frost:** Late May - Early June

**States/Regions:** Northern MN, ND, MT, SD, Canadian border areas

**Key Strategy:** Every week counts! Use cold frames, frost cloth & water walls. Choose fast-maturing varieties — Early Girl (50-62 days) is your best friend. Black plastic mulch warms soil faster.

### ☁ Zone 4 — Short Season

🌱 Seeds: Late Feb-Mar \* Harden: Mid May 🌱 Transplant: Late May-June 🍅 Harvest: July-Sept

**Last Frost:** Mid to Late May

**States/Regions:** ME, VT, NH, WI, northern MI, mountain CO

**Key Strategy:** Choose cold-tolerant varieties. Black plastic mulch warms soil earlier. A cold frame or low tunnel gives you 2-3 extra weeks at both ends of the season.

### ☁ Zone 5 — Moderate-Short Season

🌱 Seeds: Late Feb-Mar \* Harden: Late Apr 🌱 Transplant: Mid May 🍅 Harvest: June-Sept

**Last Frost:** Early to Mid May

**States/Regions:** NY, PA, OH, IN, IL, IA, NE, mid-CO

**Key Strategy:** Use row covers if late frost threatens. Mulch well. Indeterminate varieties like Better Boy give you a long harvest through September.

### ☁ Zone 6 — Moderate Season

🌱 Seeds: Early Feb \* Harden: Early Apr 🌱 Transplant: Early May 🍅 Harvest: June-Oct

**Last Frost:** Mid April to Early May

**States/Regions:** VA, KY, MO, KS, NM (mid), OR coast

**Key Strategy:** Mulching maintains moisture & temperature. Great for all variety types — even late heirlooms like Brandywine (80-100 days) have enough season here.

### \* Zone 7 — Long Season

🌱 Seeds: Jan-Feb \* Harden: Mar 🌱 Transplant: Mid Apr 🍅 Harvest: May-Oct

**Last Frost:** Early to Mid April

**States/Regions:** NC, TN, AR, OK, northern TX, WA coast

**Key Strategy:** An excellent tomato zone — long season, good heat. Stake everything; heavy fruit loads will bring plants down. Grow virtually any variety. Harvest extends into October.

### ☁ Zone 8 — Two-Season Growing

🌱 Seeds: Dec-Jan 🌱 Spring: Late March 🍅 Spring Harvest: Apr-Jun 🍅 Fall Harvest: Nov-Dec

**Last Frost:** Late March - Early April

**States/Regions:** GA, AL, MS, central TX, CA inland valleys

**Key Strategy:** Two seasons! Spring harvests through June. Summer (Jul-Aug) is your break. Start fall seeds in September, transplant October for Nov-Dec harvest. Shade cloth helps in peak summer.

### \* Zone 9 — Warm, Two-Season

🌱 Seeds: Nov-Dec 🌱 Spring: Late Feb 🍅 Spring Harvest: Mar-May 🍅 Fall Harvest: Nov-Jan

**Last Frost:** Mid to Late February

**States/Regions:** Northern FL, southern TX, AZ mid-elevation, CA central valley

**Key Strategy:** Spring ends as summer heat arrives. Drip irrigation is highly effective. Fall crop is often the star! Start fall seeds in September for a Nov-Jan harvest your Zone 5 neighbors will envy.

### ☁ Zone 10 — Hot Climate Strategy

🌱 Seeds: Oct-Nov 🌱 Transplant: Jan 🍅 Spring Harvest: Feb-Apr 🍅 Fall Harvest: Oct-Jan

**Last Frost:** January - Early February

**States/Regions:** Southern FL, San Diego CA, deep south TX, coastal HI

**Key Strategy:** Summer is too hot for fruit set (above 95°F). Don't fight it — rest the garden. Your reward: a lush fall/winter harvest while the country is buried in snow. Sun Gold and Better Boy perform best.

### ☁ Zone 11 — Near Year-Round Growing

🌱 Sow Direct: Sep-Oct & Jan-Mar 🍅 Harvest: Jan-Apr & Oct-Dec

**Last Frost:** Rare or no frost

**States/Regions:** Hawaii (low elevation), Puerto Rico, southernmost FL

**Key Strategy:** Sow directly outdoors — no indoor starting needed! Avoid the hottest months (May-Aug). Afternoon shade helps. Consistent watering year-round. Plan two growing windows around the summer heat.

#### 🌱 Seed Starting Timeline (All Zones)

Count back **6-8 weeks** from your last frost date for seed starting indoors. Then add **1-2 weeks** for hardening off before transplanting. Use this formula for every zone: *Transplant Date* - 7 weeks = *Seed Start Date*. Mark both dates on your calendar before you do anything else.

#### + Soil Temperature Matters More Than Calendar Date

Tomatoes want soil at **at least 60°F** at transplant time — cold soil stunts roots even if the air is warm. A cheap soil thermometer saves you from this mistake. Black plastic mulch can raise soil temp by 8-10°F, letting you transplant earlier in Zones 3-5.

#### ⚠️ Extend Your Season: Cool-Climate Options

Zones 3-5 gardeners: use **water walls** (Wall-O-Water) to transplant 2-4 weeks before last frost, **low tunnels** with frost cloth for overnight protection, and **cold frames** to harden seedlings faster. Every extra week matters when you have a 90-day season. See Chapter 8 in *Ripe Rewards* for full details.

📄 **Get Your FREE Personalized Growing Report:** Visit [DirtDivaDiaries.com](http://DirtDivaDiaries.com) and enter your zip code to get a custom report with your exact zone, frost dates, planting windows, and local growing tips — all tailored to *your* garden.

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Grow Your Own Way!