

## Episode 110 show notes and advice

### Episode description

For this week's episode, Sarah discusses the wonderful world of tomatoes. And with very few tomatoes and salad varieties lining the supermarket shelves, now is the perfect time to sow tomato seeds for a homegrown harvest between July and October. Listen and learn as Sarah reveals her expert tips and tricks.

### In this episode, discover:

- ❖ Specialist advice for sowing and growing tomatoes
- ❖ How to extend your growing season
- ❖ Tasty recipes to try at home

## episode 110 advice sheet

### Standout varieties (1:50)

Sarah explains that at Perch Hill they've been performing a series of taste, productivity, and ease-of-growth trials. With some clear winners for all three categories, here are Sarah's top five varieties:

- ❖ Tomato 'Sungold' – Yellow in colour, small fruit, exceptionally sweet, and incredibly juicy. A cracking variety to be grown inside or out.
- ❖ Tomato 'Noire de Crimée' (Black Russian) - produces big, juicy, and dark-coloured crimson fruit.
- ❖ Tomato 'Sugar Plum' F1 – A medium-sized tomato, very sweet with subtle acidity too. Lovely in a salad or wonderful in a pasta sauce.
- ❖ Tomato 'Tigerella' – Great for slicing up thinly and adding to a cheese sandwich. This tomato is great for colder climates. Stripy, like its namesake, it's incredibly prolific too.

### Tomato pigments and their healthy properties (4:50)

Red tomatoes, turn this colour thanks to an antioxidant pigment called lycopene. Boasting incredible health benefits, it's also thought to protect organs, in particular the prostate and the breast.

Tomatoes such as 'Black Russian' contain a black pigment called anthocyanin, which Sarah explains is also present in blueberries, and is excellent for brain health. As we grow older, it's essential to incorporate more dark fruits into our diet to optimise cognitive function. Why not start with 'Black Russian' or 'indigo Rose' or 'Chocolate cherry'?

### Top tips for sowing (6:41)

- ❖ Sow your tomatoes between the 20th February and 20th March (frost and snow permitting) into half-size seed trays.
- ❖ Sow your seeds individually into peat-free compost and cover lightly with more compost.
- ❖ Next, place the trays onto a heated bench (at Perch Hill, the bench is set to 20 degrees Celsius)
- ❖ They will begin to germinate in roughly five to seven days, and will present pointy, spear-like leaves.
- ❖ Once the outer leaves are fully upright, you'll see small tomato leaves in the middle with the classic indented leaf shape. This is your signal to prick them out.
- ❖ They are then transplanted into their own 9cm pot, again, take your peat-free compost and put the pots back on a heated bench.
- ❖ Once the roots begin to poke through the bottom of the pot, it's time to pot them on again. This time, plant them more deeply, burying a bit more of the stem than the first time the seedlings were potted on. They can form roots all the way down the stem, these are feeding roots, and are essential for gathering nutrients. They'll root more quickly and will be much stronger.
- ❖ Next, it's time to stake them. Use twine, tape, or any sustainable material to stop them from bending over. Naturally, tomatoes are climbers, although this will vary from variety to variety.

### Top tips

Not sure about pricking out? This is the process of transplanting seedlings from a tray or container to their own pot, it's as simple as that.

Sarah says don't be tempted to skip the potting on stages. If you do, you'll find that the tomato plant won't grow as it should.

The varieties Sarah mentions above are cordon types or 'indeterminate types' almost like vines, which will keep growing until they are pinched out. These will need training but have a phenomenal cropping season.

'Determinate types' are great for containers and window boxes. Sarah says Tomato 'Tumbling Tom Red' (an absolute classic) gets to a certain height and stops growing. Although it still needs to be staked, it doesn't need to be supported by a frame.

At Perch Hill, tomatoes are grown in the greenhouse to be protected against blight. So, if you have a greenhouse, this is a great time to use it. If you don't, choose a blight-resistant variety such as Tomato 'Sungold', although it will need a sunny, south-facing wall.

### **Training tomatoes and pinching out (16:00)**

For tips on training tomatoes, watch as Sarah explains how:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBnYh6Xr2j4&t=681s>

As soon as the plant is around 30cm, you'll notice that between the central stem of the cordoned varieties and the leaf, there will be a little auxiliary bud forming.

Bush types don't need to be pinched out, but it is recommended with vine varieties. Keep pinching out between two or three times a week. In July and August, more energy is transferred into fruit production, but continue to do this as we move into the summer months.

### **Ring culture pots**

A complete self-watering and plant support solution for tomatoes and similar fruits and vegetables. Perfect for use with grow bags, pots, raised beds, and on allotments. These are available at all good retailers.

The pot comprises two chambers. The central chamber, which isn't very deep, and the outer, moat-like chamber, which has prongs that go down deep into the soil.

Sarah says for the best results, feed the superficial roots of the tomato by pouring liquid feed into the central chamber. Add water to the outer chamber to give the deep-water roots

essential hydration and prevent water evaporation. This will lead to an intense flavour and a more productive plant.

If you don't want to purchase a ring culture pot, you can also make your own with a plastic water bottle and a skewer, there are plenty of videos that will teach you how to do this on the internet.

### **Companion planting (17:45)**

Essential for keeping whitefly and aphids at bay. It's a super simple, organic method that's a great alternative to pesticides and insecticides.

Tagetes and tomatoes are excellent companions, which are truly effective. This is thanks to the limonene that the tagetes produce, which is a citronella-like smell, proven to keep insects away.

Similarly, basil is another great companion plant for tomatoes. At Perch Hill, Sarah lets every third plant flower which she says helps to draw in the pollinators. Great for tomato production and healthy plants.

Want to learn more about companion planting? Listen back to our dedicated episode here: <https://www.sarahraven.com/podcast/show-notes-ep106>

### **Extending the season (19:34)**

Trying to extend your tomato growing season can only be of benefit right now with national shortages. At Perch Hill, Sarah finds that it's better to train in than pinch out. This has meant that they've been able to harvest tomatoes well into November.

### **Harvesting the fruit (20:51)**

Water plays a crucial role in harvesting tomatoes. Sarah says don't harvest after watering, harvest before. Sarah (or the irrigation system) tends to water the plants first thing in the morning, between 5 AM – 6 AM to prevent the plants becoming scorched in the hot sun.

Once the trusses begin to form fruit, it's time to feed the plant with homemade potash, which is a really rich fertiliser made from comfrey juice. Visit our previous episode for tips on how to make your own feed: <https://www.sarahraven.com/podcast/show-notes-ep106>

Don't put the freshly picked tomatoes in the fridge. Cold temperatures mean that some of their sugars turn to starch and their flavour lessens. Instead, leave on a plate somewhere warm. They'll keep for 3 to 4 days.

### **Recipe inspiration (22:40)**

#### A simple tomato gazpacho

- ❖ 500g of tomatoes (mixed varieties)
- ❖ One mini cucumber like 'La Diva' or half a standard cucumber
- ❖ 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- ❖ 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar (containing the mother) or red wine vinegar
- ❖ A dash of flaky salt

whizzed up in a food processor, ready in less than a minute. Why not add a hard-boiled egg for texture? To make a consommé, place the ingredients through a muslin without squeezing.

#### Cretan stuffed tomatoes

- ❖ Create a small slit/flap which will work as a lid for your tomato and scoop out the seeds (make sure you keep them).
- ❖ Peel and chop a potato and put this in the bottom of your baking tray to soak up the juices.
- ❖ Soak rice for half an hour to soften and combine with a finely chopped onion, the tomato juices, and the seeds.
- ❖ Scoop back into the tomato shell and gently bake. Add salt, vinegar, and a little bit of olive oil to the bottom for added flavour.