

episode 5 show notes and advice

Episode Description

Adding tomatoes to a delicious soup recipe is one thing - with the burst of flavour from homegrown varieties such as 'Indigo Rose', not to mention their incredible health benefits, overall, they are a real life-enhancer. Bringing you the best methods for growing your own, in this episode of 'grow, cook, eat, arrange', Sarah and Arthur run through every step of tomato growing; from building sowing, planting, pinching out, training all the way to perfect picking.

You'll also find out how to propagate Arthur's pick of sweet peas - the vibrant, 'acid pink' Barry Dare, and what makes them the biggest cut-and-come-again flower in the garden.

In this episode, discover...

- The pleasant aromatic impact of growing your own tomatoes
- A number of great recipes for your tomatoes
- How to create a silver birch teepee for sweet peas
- Picking and conditioning Arthur's favourite sweet peas

Links and references

Pre-order Sarah's new book: <http://bit.ly/3cR0kyh>

Pre-order Arthur's new book: <http://bit.ly/3qiBgUs>

Shop on the Sarah Raven website: <http://bit.ly/3jvbaeu>

Get in touch: info@sarahraven.com

Products mentioned:

Cherry Tomato Collection: <http://bit.ly/3bQmTRs>

Essential Tomato Seed Collection: <http://bit.ly/37YRi2T>

Tomato 'Sungold': <http://bit.ly/308iDHq>

Tomato 'Indigo Rose': <http://bit.ly/3sVzvXN>

Tomato 'Noire de Crimée': <http://bit.ly/2NND3TS>

Tagetes patula 'Strawberry Blonde': <http://bit.ly/3uMMq6B>

Tomato 'Stupicke Polni Rane': <http://bit.ly/2PnCfVT>

All sweet pea ranges: <https://bit.ly/3bYBAIB>

Sweet Pea 'Barry Dare': <http://bit.ly/2PnCMHn>

Sweet Pea 'Matucana': <http://bit.ly/3bSSMZC>

Follow Sarah: <https://bit.ly/3jDTvBp>

Follow Arthur: <https://bit.ly/3jxSKK5>

episode 5 advice sheet | tomatoes and sweet peas

Tomatoes

The ones we particularly love are:

- **Texan wild cherry tomato (bush type)**

Tiny sugar bombs and good as trailers out of the sides of a pot

- **Sungold (cordon type)**

Saffron-coloured cherry tomato. Productive, and exceptionally sweet

- **Indigo Rose (cordon type)**

Rich in anthocyanin pigment (also found in blueberries, and particularly good for brain function and improved memory), as well as lycopene (the pigment that makes most tomatoes red). So these varieties are particularly good for you.

Lycopene

Tomatoes contain high levels of lycopene, the most powerful antioxidant to have been measured in food. It gives the deep red pigment to plants, and is also found in watermelon, papaya and rosehip, as well as grapefruit, asparagus, parsley and basil – rich sources but not red at all. These vegetables are even better for us when they have been processed in some way, making the lycopene more available, with up to three times the amount when cooked compared with raw.

Lycopene's anti-cancer benefits have been shown repeatedly. The evidence is strongest for prostate, but also linked to a decrease in lung, stomach and breast cancer. In tomatoes, it's the skin that has the highest concentration, so you want to leave that on and use as much tomato paste, tomato puree and sundried tomatoes as you can in your diet. These three provide the most lycopene gram per gram.

Always aim to eat tomatoes with a small amount of oil. Lycopene is fat-soluble, so to absorb it efficiently, you need the oil. This is true when you cook them, but there is also recent evidence to suggest that lycopene is more bioavailable from raw tomatoes when eaten with an oil-based salad dressing or with avocados.

Ring Culture Cultivation

Use ring culture pots to maximise tomato production and flavour. These pots enable you to feed into a central chamber – where the superficial feeding roots of tomatoes grow, and water into the outer moat, which directs moisture to the deeper roots. There's then no waste of the feed or dilution of flavour.

Space your seedlings about half a metre apart, so that the leaves of the fully-grown plants don't overlap.

Support and care of tomatoes

The bush types don't need a tall cane and don't need pinching, but they still grow best with a bit of support from a short, stout cane at their side.

Support cordon tomatoes with a cane at their side to tie them into on a regular basis.

Once a week, pinch out all their side shoots. These are the axillary buds which form between the main stem and a leaf. The flowering trusses grow directly from the main stem, not in a leaf, so it's easy to see which is a flowering truss and which is an axillary bud. Just pinch them between your finger and thumb.

If you're growing them inside, pinch out the tops of your cordon tomatoes when they have formed six fruiting trusses, or with cherry varieties, it's seven. Before the flowers have formed, water once a week, and feed once a fortnight. Once flowers are fruit start to form, water once a week and feed once a week. In hot weeks, you may need to water every couple of days (or more if using pots or grow bags), but still feed just once a week.

Companion Plants

We underplant our tomatoes, inside and out with basil and the lovely flowering *Tagetes patula* 'Linnaeus Burning Embers'.

Roasted Tomato soup

This is one of my favourite soups, good to cook when there is a glut of tomatoes, and it's also brilliant for freezing. The sundried tomatoes are key, both to the intensity and richness of taste and for our health. For optimum anti-cancer benefits, eat this with a bowl of steamed broccoli on

the side. The broccoli florets are delicious dipped in the warm soup and make a great alternative to bread.

For 6 as main (8 as starter)

- 1 kg ripe tomatoes
- 2 bulbs of fennel (approx. 400g)
- 2 large onions, peeled, quartered
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and black pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
- 8 sundried tomatoes or 12 sun-blushed tomatoes in oil, (plus a few extra to garnish)
- 2 tbsp grated ginger (40g)
- ½ small red chilli, finely chopped, or 1 dried chilli, crumbled
- 30g bunch of coriander
- 300ml tomato juice
- 2 x 400g tins of coconut milk
- 30g bunch of dill
- 4 tbs Thai fish sauce
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- Zest & juice of 2 limes

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas mark 4.

2. Coarsely chop the tomatoes (but don't skin them), fennel and onion, and roast with 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt and black pepper, for about 30–40 minutes until slightly browning at the edges.

3. Meanwhile, heat a little more olive oil in a saucepan and cook the garlic, sundried tomatoes, ginger, chilli for 3–4 minutes.

4. Strip the leaves from the coriander and chop the stems and root if you have it. The root has the most flavour, so if you grow your own, use it. Put the leaves to one side, but add the coriander stems and roots.

5. Add the tomato juice and coconut milk, and cook for a few more minutes. Cover, remove from the heat and allow the flavours to infuse for 10 minutes.

6. Add the tomatoes, fennel, onions, and then the dill, fish sauce, soy sauce, lime zest & juice and seasoning. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes.

7. Blend in a food processor and serve with sliced sundried tomatoes on top and/or coriander. I like this best warm, but you can also serve it cold.

Two-colour gazpacho

You can make this gazpacho in less than 5 minutes. It's simple, pure and healthy, one of my favourite recipes for the summer and early autumn when tomatoes are at their best. If you don't grow your own and can't find yellow or orange tomatoes, just use sweet reds. If you use a mix of tomato varieties rather than just one type, you get a mix of sweetness and acidity and a better taste. This is true of any tomato-based recipe, but particularly when you're eating the tomatoes raw. This recipe is not precise, so you don't have to be careful about quantities. Just put everything in a food processor together and whizz it up. It's good served with oatcakes.

For 4 as a main course, 6 as a starter:

For the red soup

- 1 small red pepper (about 75–100g), deseeded and coarsely chopped
- 300g red tomatoes, ideally a mix of varieties
- 1/2 cucumber (about 150–200g), roughly chopped
- 1/2 red chilli, deseeded and roughly chopped
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 spring onions (optional)
- 2 tbsp organic apple cider vinegar
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for serving
- Sea salt and black pepper

For the yellow soup

- 1 small yellow pepper (about 75–100g), deseeded and coarsely chopped
- 300g yellow tomatoes
- ½ cucumber (about 150–200g), roughly chopped
- ½ red chilli, deseeded and roughly chopped
- 2 garlic cloves
- 2 spring onions (optional)
- 2 tbsp organic apple cider vinegar
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for serving
- Sea salt and black pepper

Put the pepper, tomatoes, cucumber, chilli, garlic and spring onions for the red soup into a food processor. Purée until pretty smooth. Add the vinegar, olive oil, salt and pepper and blitz again. Pour into a jug.

Repeat this method with the yellow soup ingredients.

Pour from the jugs at the same time into each bowl – one on either side. Add a swirl of extra virgin olive oil and serve.

Sweet peas

Arthur and Sarah's favourite sweet peas are:

- 'Barry Dare' – Arthur's favourite

Deep jewel pink-red

- 'Matucana' – Sarah's favourite

The most highly scented of all

Sowing Sweet Peas

For maximum stem length, you want to get going with your sweet pea sowing now. If you want towering vases, (even in the north of the country with cooler temperatures at this time of year), early March is your last moment.

Soak or not to soak

Most trials have proved that soaking or softening seed prior to sowing is not necessary. You do not need to nick the seed coat either.

Sowing

We recommend using root trainers (or loo rolls). Both give a nice deep, narrow root run, just what sweet peas need. In a root trainer, the grooves down the side of each cell encourage a quickly branching root system and therefore stronger root growth.

Potting medium

A loamless compost, with an open structure (such as a multi-purpose potting compost, with added John Innes) is what you want. The plant roots need air, as well as moisture and nutrients.

Mice

You need to guard against mice. If you've sown in a cold greenhouse, put the trays on a sheet of wood or ply (not hardboard), so that there's a good overhang from the side of the bench and the mice can't climb up on to the plants. We use old doors stacked on concrete blocks, but for those of us who are not growing thousands, a bit of board is fine.

Growing on

Don't water after sowing, only water when they start to come through, usually in 10-14 days. Store them in a cold greenhouse or cold frame. Don't mollycoddle them — that's the most common mistake. There is no need to use a heated propagator or warm windowsill - heat can actually inhibit germination and cause seed rot. These are pretty hardy plants and both seeds and seedlings can cope with spring frosts.

Pinch out

Pinch out the leader - the growing tip, when there are 3 or 4 pairs of leaves. Just squeeze the top off between your finger and thumb, reducing the plant to about 5cms. This promotes vigorous side shoot formation.

Create frames

While they're growing under cover, create climbing frames in the garden. You can use bamboo, but silver birch or hazel pea sticks are the nicest thing. If the wood is harvested now, the sap is rising, so the branches are pliable and they're not yet in leaf. Find a supplier local to you (<http://coppice-products.co.uk>).

Planting out

Once you've got bushy little seedlings 5-8cm tall. with roots coming out the bottom of the root trainer, plant out, 2 seedlings to each upright. That gives a good covering and plenty of cut flowers without the hassle of cordon training. Dig a deep hole and fill the base with farmyard manure. Back fill about 2-3cms of soil and plant your sweet peas. Tie them into the base of the arch or frame and water them in well.

Mulch

Mulching helps feed the roots, retain moisture in the soil and protect against slugs by encouraging blackbirds. If you mulch with your own garden compost, ground feeding birds will come and rootle around in it for worms, slugs and beetles.

Tying in

Keep tying in sweet peas as they start to romp away. Aim to do this once every 10 days at least, and right through their growing season. If you encourage them to grow vertically, their flower stems will be straight and you'll get better flower production.

Feeding

Sweet peas love a potash-rich feed. Use Tomorite or comfrey juice, feeding them every fortnight.

Harvest Flowers

Pick, pick, pick. Once seed pods form they will think their life's work is done and will stop flowering, so the more you pick, the more they'll flower.

Making a teepee

Teepees can be made from bamboo canes, or hazel or silver birch. The supporting canes or branches, referred to as uprights, need to be at least 2m (6ft) tall. You can supplement these with smaller sticks pushed in between each upright, around the base. With bamboo canes, you need to add a network of twine between the uprights to create an efficient climbing frame, which doesn't look so good, but does the job. For hazel and birch, you can use bundles of thinner side branches to wrap around the uprights. The twiggy nature of the thinner birch branches make them the best climbing frame, giving the plants plenty of handholds on which to climb. Whatever you use, push a circle of 8 uprights into the ground, sinking them a good 20cm (8in) deep. It's key to secure the teepee well into the ground. The inner circle should be about a 1m (3ft) diameter.

Gather the 8 uprights together close to their tips and tie with a robust flexi-tie or piece of twine. If using birch or hazel, you need to wrap the smaller branches around the structure. Start at one upright in the circle, gather all the thinner side branches about 45cm (18in) from the ground and hold them together in your right hand. Twist horizontally. Carry on twisting until you get to the next upright and twist the second bundle, binding and weaving it in with the next and so on until you get to the beginning again, reversing back on yourself to tie off any loose ends.

Next, move 45cm (18in) up towards the top of the teepee and do another layer in the same way. For tall tepees, you may have room to add a third layer.

We also make teepees with one long spiral from the top to the bottom of the teepee, so the whole thing looks like a helter-skelter. To do this, keep twisting spirally, gathering as you go, until you reach the top. You'll probably need to work from a stepladder.