

# Vegetable Gardening

## How to Grow a Salsa Garden



### What to Grow

Not just any tomato will render the best base for your salsa. Paste tomatoes are smaller, with a full tomato flavor that comes from rich meaty low-moisture flesh. Some paste tomato varieties to try are 'San Marzano', 'Roma', and 'Veeroma'.

What peppers you grow depends on what level of heat you prefer in your salsa. It's always a good practice to wear gloves when handling peppers, regardless of heat level.

Tomatillos are a must for most traditional salsas, yet they are an ingredient that is often overlooked in many homemade recipes. Tomatillos were cultivated by the ancient Aztecs and have remained a common component in Mexican cuisine.

Onions, chives, garlic, cilantro, basil, oregano, cucumbers and more also have a place in the salsa garden.

### CHOOSE A FEW

**Parsley** is a biennial herb that has flat leaf or curly leaf varieties. Plant two or three plants in your garden.

**Basil** - There are several kinds of basil varieties, but sweet basil is recommended for a salsa garden. Basil is an annual herb and you can plant two to three plants.

**Cilantro** is a very strong herb. It is an annual and easy to start from seed. Plant two or three plants in a garden.

**Onions** can be planted from seeds or sets. Select red, white or yellow for your garden. Plant up to 30 onion sets in the salsa garden.

**Peppers** - Plant two or three pepper plants in your garden. Plant any green, sweet, bell type of pepper. If you like hot, spicy salsa, plan to also grow a hot pepper variety.



**Tomatoes** - Plant at least two tomato plants. Try one paste tomato variety, such as Roma. Roma has medium sized, oblong tomatoes with a thick meaty flesh. Also plant a large type tomato such as Celebrity or Delicious.

### BASICS

Tomatoes, peppers and chiles, eggplant, tomatillo, and potatoes are all members of the nightshade family (*Solanaceae*). Though some members of this family contain poisonous alkaloids (as do potato tubers that turn green after exposure to sunlight), these five vegetables are some of the favorites in the garden.

All except potatoes grow best in warm weather. All, except potato, are eaten for the tasty fruit they produce. These vegetables share some of the same pests and crop rotation can be an important control strategy.

### TOMATOES

#### Planting

- You can grow your own tomatoes from seeds started indoors or buy transplants. Tomato seeds are rarely planted directly into the garden in Illinois.
- Start seeds indoors planting them 1/4-1/2" deep, 4-6 weeks before the average last frost date.

## SALSA GARDEN LAYOUT

Tomato Tomato Pepper Pepper Pepper

Cilantro Onions Parsley Basil Oregano



### (BASED ON 4X10' BED SPACING)

- At optimum germination temperatures of 75-80°F seedlings should appear in about six days.
- Grow them at 60-75°F. Transplant into larger pots as the seedlings grow and give them good light so the plants stay short and stocky.
- If you purchase tomato transplants, look for short, stocky plants with good root systems and stems about the thickness of a pencil. If you must purchase tall, leggy transplants, plant them by placing them on their side and covering the lower portion of the stem with soil. New roots will form on the stem.
- Plant outside about two weeks after the average last frost date or when soil temperature remains above 60°F.
- If using cages or stakes, put these in the ground as you place the transplants.
- If growing in a container, select container proportional to the expected size of the plant.
- Mulching with straw or wood chips could lessen disease and manage moisture.

### PEPPERS

- You can grow your own pepper plants from seeds started indoors or buy transplants.
- Because peppers and chiles come in so many

different shapes, colors, and levels of hotness, many gardeners take advantage of the wide variety available at garden centers. Buy stocky plants 4-6" high with good green color.

- Pepper seeds are rarely planted directly into the garden in Illinois.
- Start seeds indoors, planting them about 1/2" deep 4-6 weeks before the average last frost date. At optimum germination temperatures of 75-80 F seedlings should appear in seven to eight days. Grow them at 65-80 F.
- Transplant into larger pots as the seedlings grow and give them good light so the plants stay short and stocky.
- Peppers will not tolerate prolonged periods below 50°F and do not grow well in cold, wet soil.
- Don't plant your peppers and chiles too early.

### SOURCES

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