

Decker's Seed Starting:

Best seeds to start indoors at the end of March: Tomatoes, Peppers, Cauliflower, Broccoli,

Amazing array of Botanical Interests Organic Tomatoes – Cherry Tomatoes, Beefsteak, San Marzano, Romano-and more -pick your favorites. Determinate will be smaller plant and produce crop at one time. Indeterminate will need staking and bear fruit over longer season with fruit clusters at intervals along their ever-growing stems. Always good to have both for earliest crop through September.

What you'll need:

- Mini-greenhouse seed starter tray, cells, cover: 8, 10, 32 or 72 – pick your size.
 - Bag of Espoma Organic Seed Starter Mix
 - Botanical Interests Seed packets
 - Espoma Organic Tomato fertilizer (dilute for seedlings)
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1. Fill tray with seed starter mix leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ " at top, tap tray to settle soil, water well but don't over saturate or pack down soil. If using 4" peat pots better to dampen soil mix first, adding enough water to allow you to make a ball before crumbling into the pots.
 2. Choose largest seeds for planting – 2-3 per cell.
 3. Add sprinkling of starter mix $\frac{1}{4}$ " on top of seeds and spray to moisten.
 4. Put cover on.
 5. If you can, place covered tray on top of fridge as heat released from freezer will warm the soil. Tomato seeds need soil 60 degrees or higher to germinate. Soil warming mats are also helpful
 6. Tomato seeds germinate in 5-10 days Remove cover as soon as you see sprouts.
 7. Keep adjusting LED so seedlings are 3" under LED to encourage stocky plants and avoid leggy seedlings.
 8. Keep seedlings warm and moist, rotate if they start leaning in one direction.
 9. Once seedlings have true leaves (2nd set) start feeding with diluted organic liquid fertilizer once a week. Thin to keep only the strongest seedling in each cell- snip at the base leaving the roots as added organic compost.
 10. Stems will grow sturdier if tossed by "the wind" – turn on oscillating fan for 10 min a day or brush the tops lightly with your hands to simulate.
 11. When seedlings are 2-3" tall time to plant in a 4" peat pot using the same moist potting mix. Plant deeper in the larger pot-so that more of the stem is in the soil to grow more roots.
 12. Hardening off seedlings – mid-May as temperatures are consistently warm day and night above 60 degrees. Bring seedling trays outside in shade for a couple of hours and back in @ night. Each day stay out for more hours moving slowly into more sunlight.
 13. Early planting does not help tomatoes – May 31st is preferred LI planting.
 14. When planting outdoors dig hole deep to plant all but the top 2 sets of leaves. If you can't plant deep build a trench to plant sideways. In a few days tops will reach for the sun and grow upright. All white bristles will become roots which will grow a stronger, healthier plant with more fruit!
 15. Water deeply and regularly ensuring 1" per week.
 16. Companion plants: Basil and Borage repel tomato hornworms, Marigolds also repel many insects
 17. Pinch off bottom leaves when plant is 3ft tall as they turn yellow and are not needed.
 18. Pinch off the suckers that grow in the "V" of stem & branch.
 19. Start harvesting when tomato colors deepen - red, yellow, gold, orange and striped. ENJOY!