



Corvus Landing Farm Tomato FAQ

What do “determinate” and “indeterminate” mean?

Indeterminate varieties continually produce new flowers and fruit until something stops them (usually frost or rain). Determinate varieties set a few flushes of fruit and ripen it all at once. Indeterminates tend to be sprawling vines, whereas determinates are more bushy and take up less space. At the coast, determinates are more reliable for fruit production, since they tend to ripen the fruit they have instead of putting energy into more leaves and green fruit. Indeterminates have potential for greater production, if managed properly, but require more care.

What variety is best?

Select appropriate varieties for a better chance of success. Cherry tomatoes, determinates, small fruited varieties, and Russian heirlooms are generally good bets. Our two favorite varieties are Sungold (F1 hybrid, produces tons of super sweet orange cherries, best producer at the coast), and Moskvich (extra early red slicer, Russian heirloom, terrific flavor). Other great varieties we grow and recommend are:

Cherries:

- Harvest Luck (German heirloom, red cherries on somewhat compact plants)
- Black Cherry (Great flavor, a bit less vigorous and productive than the other two)

Determinates and dwarf tomatoes (great for patios and container gardening):

- Aurora (Siberian heirloom, most reliable slicer, meaty red tomatoes)
- Cyril's Choice (English heirloom, small red tomatoes, very cute plants)
- Silver Fir Tree (German heirloom, small red tomatoes, decorative foliage)

Heirloom slicers:

- Black Prince (Russian heirloom, tasty smaller black tomatoes)
- Prudens Purple (Early pink brandywine, a bit later to ripen than others we grow)
- Survivor (Beautiful, delicious black tomatoes, a bit later to ripen than others we grow)

I live right at the beach. Can I get ripe tomatoes?

Tomatoes like heat. So the further you are from the ocean, the more tomatoes you are likely to get. That being said, if you can give your tomatoes a warm and sheltered spot (say, on a deck against a wall and protected from the wind), with the right varieties you can definitely get fruit. I recommend determinates or cherries in this situation; you're unlikely to get any of the larger fruited varieties. Even away from the beach, the more heat you can give your plants the happier they'll be. Try row cover or plastic over them when they are smaller to help them get established. You can also try black plastic mulch or something else to heat the soil around them (flagstones? Charcoal powder?). Pruning helps, too, which leads us to...

Should I prune my tomatoes? How about trellises?

In my book the answer is a definitive yes! Pruning gives your plants more air circulation (helpful in our moist environment) and helps them focus on ripening fruit instead of just growing lots of leaves. We only grow indeterminates, and we prune them to 2 leaders. This picture (from growgardentomatoes.com) shows where to prune. The stem is running vertically, then there is a leaf coming out from the stem. At the base of the leaf is a new leader that will make new stems and leaves and leaders, and those will make new stems and leaves and leaders, and so on. We leave JUST the main growing tip and one more leader. All other leaders are pinched off as the tomato grows. We end up with two stems, with very large leaves, large ripe fruit, and good air circulation. You may think you're cutting off a lot of the plant, but we've found drastic differences in the amount and quality of fruit we get on pruned tomatoes. I highly recommend it, especially here at the coast. Determinates don't need as much pruning, but benefit from some support and wouldn't mind a bit of "opening up".



To trellis our tomatoes, we run a wire parallel to the ground about 8 feet up. We drop 2 strings from the wire and clip them to the base of each stem. As the tomato grows, we just wrap the string around the stem, supporting it as it goes. You can also use tomato cages, sturdy bamboo stakes, or T-posts spaced along a row with twine strung on either side of the plant as they grow. I'm sure there's a million ways to keep them off the ground, and the internet will certainly have a lot to say about it, and about pruning too. Below see our trellis in action on young plants (left) and some well-pruned sungolds (right). See the size of the fruit? And the light and air space coming through even on 7' tall plants?

