



Tomatillos

Crow Wing County Master Gardeners *Giving Gardens* Guide to Tomatillos

Author: Jennifer Lee, U of M Extension Crow Wing County Master Gardener

DESCRIPTION

Known as the “little tomato”, tomatillo fruit is much firmer and more tart than a tomato and is used in many Mexican and Southwestern food favorites. Once the husk is removed, the sticky film that covers the fruit must be removed before using. One cup of chopped tomatillos has 42 calories and is packed with Vitamins C and K.

PLANT SITE REQUIREMENTS

Sun	Full Sun - six plus hours of sun daily
Soil	Well-drained, nutrient-rich soil. Amend soil with 3 to 5 inches of compost or other organic matter prior to planting.
Soil Temp	70 degrees; warm soil is better than cool. Bring seedlings indoors if night temperatures are below 55 degrees.
Placement	Two or more plants are recommended for blooms to pollinate and produce fruit. Member of the nightshade family and should not be planted in an area where other nightshade plants such as potatoes, tomatoes, eggplant and peppers were planted in previous three to four years.

PLANT SELECTION

Type	Description
Purple	1.5" fruit; sweeter flavor
Green, called Verde	2" fruit
Tamayo	3" fruit
De Milpa	1" fruit; tangier flavor

Indeterminate - continue to grow all season; develop long vines that need to be supported; continue producing fruit until killed by frost. Picking fruit as it ripens will encourage the plant to continue producing.

Days to Maturity – 60 to 75 days

Disease- Tomatillos are vulnerable to many of the diseases that affect potatoes, tomatoes, peppers and eggplants. Practice crop rotation to reduce disease problems. Blight can affect tomatillos and verticillium will can cause yellowing and wilt on plants.

Insects – Cutworms can chew stems of young transplants at the soil line. To discourage, place a strip of paper around the young stem when planting transplants. Tomato hornworm and Colorado potato beetle may also cause problems.

PLANTING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Start seeds indoors four to five weeks before the last spring frost; usually toward the end of April. Transplant seedlings into the garden after the soil is warm and danger of frost has passed.
- Tomatillos grow tall and need as much as three feet between plants for growth and air circulation.
- Due to size, plan to trellis, cage or stake the plants.
- It is recommended to grow more than one plant for best fruit creation. Cross-pollination between two different varieties is ideal.
- If plants begin to crowd each other, prune them back.
- Tomatillos also grow well in pots and can be planted in 5-gallon buckets.

MAINTENANCE

Watering – The plants have strong root systems and need one inch of water per week. Soak the soil thoroughly when watering, once or twice a week. Do not overhead water as wet leaves are more disease prone. Drip irrigation is best.

Fertilization – Apply phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) according to soil test recommendations.

Temperature Requirements – Tomatillos are warm season plants and thus are sensitive to temperature fluctuations. Warm days with cool nights below 55 degrees, or warm days above 90 degrees can cause flowers to abort.

Pollination – Plants require cross pollination. Bees are attracted to the yellow blossoms.

Harvest – The tomatillo is ready for harvest when the fruit is green and has filled out the husk. If left to ripen further, the fruit will split the husk and turn yellow or purple depending on type. Overly ripe fruit lacks the tart flavor and firm flesh of green tomatillos.

Storage – Store tomatillos in their husks for 2 to 3 weeks in a paper bag in the vegetable bin of the refrigerator. Tomatillos can be frozen by peeling the husk, rinsing and drying the fruit and placing them whole in freezer bags.

Questions or Problems - go to <http://www.extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden> and look for “Plant Diseases” – “What Insect is this?” – “What’s wrong with my Plant?” – “Is this Plant a Weed?”

Tomatillo Salsa Verde

Ingredients

1 pound tomatillos, husked	3 serrano chile peppers, stemmed and seeded
½ medium finely chopped onion	3 tablespoons chopped cilantro or parsley
1 teaspoon minced garlic or 3 cloves peeled and quartered	1 ½ teaspoon salt, or to taste
	Enough water to cover tomatillos

Instructions

- 1 Scrub tomatillos with water to remove sap, place in a medium saucepan and add only enough water to cover.
- 2 Bring tomatillos to a simmer over medium heat and cook for 5 minutes or until tender.
- 3 Transfer tomatillos to a food processor/blender and add ¼ cup of the cooking liquid. Add onion, chili, garlic and cilantro or parsley and blend until smooth.
- 4 Cover and refrigerate until cold. Serve cold or at room temperature with tortilla chips.