

# Sutton Foster's Tomato Growing Tips



I just finished reading Sutton Foster's book, "[Hooked: How Crafting Saved My Life](#)." I got it because she's crocheting on the cover of the book and that's my go-to craft. It's also her go-to craft, however she enjoys many other crafts as well. She even mentions gardening in the book. Specifically, she talks about the memories of her dad growing tomato plants. Moreover, she provides his top ten tips for growing "the perfect sandwich-sized fruit."

## Is Gardening a Craft? An Art? A Hobby?

I don't particularly delineate between these things, and I get the sense that Sutton Foster doesn't either. She definitely knows the difference between a hobby and a job. She's a

television and Broadway actress as a profession. She uses crafting to calm, soothe, restore, heal her, something she's been doing since she was a kid. She mentions cross-stitch, knitting, collage, glass art, painting, drawing, baking, and gardening throughout her book. In terms of the roles they play in her life, they seem relatively interchangeable. Gardening can be a craft, an art, a hobby. Of course, it can also be a job, and then it's a little bit different.

## **Tomato Garden Memories**

Foster had a complex childhood, and her parents had a complicated, pained relationship. But she remembers gardening as one of the things that they all enjoyed together. Her dad was the one who loved to garden. He planted a variety of different things, and she planted with him. Her mother got involved a bit as well, collecting the seeds in the fall for replanting in the spring. And they all enjoyed the tomato sandwiches made from the tomatoes grown in their own garden.

## **10 Tomato Growing Tips**

In brief, here are Sutton Foster's ten tomato-growing tips, which are actually her "Papa Bob's Tips."

### **1. It all starts with great soil.**

This is true of most things that you plant in your garden, of course. Don't neglect this part of gardening; it's foundational.

### **2. Pick the right tomatoes.**

She recommends beefsteak tomatoes. They're hearty and perfect for those sandwiches her family loved to eat.

### **3. Plant tomatoes in the sun.**

Specifically, she recommends a spot that gets 4-6 hours of daily sunlight. Of course, this depends on the tomatoes that you choose to plant as well as environmental factors. But it's a good starting point.

### **4. Plant tomatoes to grow upwards.**

You want to use a [DIY trellis](#), tomato cages, or other support to assist the vines of your tomato plants to grow vertically.

### **5. Focus on growing the main vines of the tomato plant.**

Foster explains that tomato plants have lots of little extra growth shoots that try to grow off of the main vine. However, you should pull those off. This allows the plant to concentrate its energy on great growth along the main vine. I didn't actually know this tip myself.

### **6. Avoid overwatering your tomato plants.**

This is one of the most common causes of tomatoes that [aren't growing properly](#).

### **7. Use fertilizer.**

She recommends a name brand liquid fertilizer that you apply every two weeks. However, you can make a DIY fertilizer or choose your own favorite. Follow the instructions that are relevant to your specific tomatoes as well as to the fertilizer you're using.

### **8. Fight off bugs.**

Bugs love tomato plants. They also often kill them. There are many methods of dealing with them, of course. Foster

recommends planting marigolds near your tomato plants because they are a natural insect repellent. Furthermore, she points out that if you pop the head off of marigolds at the end of the season, the seeds are neatly stored right there for you to collect and replant in the spring.

## **9. Pick tomatoes when they are not quite ripe.**

Why? Because the plant still has more opportunity to grow additional tomatoes on that vine. However, it needs the space and ability to do so.

## **10. Ripen tomatoes on the counter.**

Place them in the sun. Let them fully ripen. Enjoy!

### **Read More:**

- [Dealing With Tomato Blight](#)
- [Reasons Why Tomato Foliage Curl](#)
- [To Prune or Not to Prune: Keeping Tomatoes in Check](#)

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# **To Prune or Not to Prune? Keeping Tomatoes in Check**



*TO PRUNE OR NOT TO PRUNE?*

## *Keeping Tomatoes in Check*

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To prune or not to prune, that is the question! [Tomatoes](#) are one of the most popular garden plants for a reason. They're fairly easy to grow, produce an impressive yield, and are



available in many interesting varieties. There are many schools of thought when it comes to tomato pruning. So what's the right way to do things? Should you let tomatoes grow wild? Or keep them neat and tidy?

## Tomato pruning

I believe that you should do what works for you. Whether you decide to prune heavily or not, you'll probably end up with at least some tomatoes if all other conditions are met. [Pruning](#) heavily results in a neat and tidy look. It ensures that most of the plant's energy goes into creating fruit.

But pruning aggressively can also be a lot of work. It requires paying close attention to your plants. I used to prune heavily, but now I'm a lot more laid back with it. Picking the suckers off is pretty easy to do, especially if you check on your plants regularly.

If even that sounds like a lot of work, choose tomato varieties that require no pruning, like compact and dwarf determinate varieties.

## The dos and don'ts of pruning tomatoes

Here are things you should and shouldn't do when pruning tomatoes:

- **Do give tomatoes enough room to breathe.** Crowding plants reduces airflow and invites pests and disease. Pruning can help improve airflow and allow you to plant tomatoes closer to one another without suffocating plants.
- **Do keep enough foliage to protect the plant and fruits from sun damage.** Removing too much of a plant leaves it vulnerable to weather and sunburn. Instead, keep some leaves around for protection.
- **Do remove foliage that's touching the ground.** Soil keeps plants alive, but it's also a potential breeding ground

for all sorts of nefarious fungi and bacteria. So even if you're a lazy gardener, make sure to prune the lower leaves of a tomato plant to avoid potential contamination.

- **Do use cuttings to propagate new tomato plants.** Just because you've snipped off a branch doesn't mean you need to toss it into the compost. Instead, you can propagate a whole new tomato plant by placing the cutting in a cup of water. Within a week or so, you'll notice roots start to appear, and soon after, you can plant the cutting and enjoy a whole new tomato plant.
- **Don't prune determinate tomatoes.** Some pruning at the base of the plant may be required, but you should prune determinate tomatoes minimally. By removing stems and offshoots, you risk limiting your harvest.
- **Don't prune after rainfall when plants are still wet.** This is a good way to spread and introduce disease. Instead, wait till the plant is dry before pruning.
- **Do make sure to give support to tomato plants.** Whether you use bamboo poles or [cages](#), tomatoes need support structures to stay upright. Plants that sprawl on the ground are more likely to pick up diseases.
- **Don't use inflexible ties.** You'll need ties to fix tomato plants to support to keep them from bending or toppling over. Use flexible ties to do the job to prevent damage to the stem as the plant grows.

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## **Profitable Greenhouse Crops: Money in Your Pockets**



You've been growing for a while. You've built a DIY [greenhouse](#) (or [invested in one](#)) and decided that you want to turn your hobby into a profitable small business. Which plants should you focus on growing to ensure steady cash flow? Here are the most profitable greenhouse crops that you should consider growing:

## Tomatoes

Tomatoes are the star of the garden world, and they thrive in greenhouse conditions. People love [tomatoes](#)! Choose specialty varieties, like heirloom strains, to offer unique selections to your customers. Pick indeterminate varieties for a continuous yield. No farmer's market stand is quite right without tomatoes, after all.

## Leafy greens

Lettuce, [kale](#), chard, spinach are highly sought after produce items. There are also plenty of specialty varieties that can be marketed as gourmet. Leafy greens are easy to grow and



harvest. They also mature quicker than many other types of produce. Spinach, for instance, takes less than a month before it's ready to harvest. People don't mind paying a premium for fancy, flavorful lettuce mixes.

Rhubarb and Swiss Chard both great options that have edible leafy red stalks, and you can use this free comprehensive guide on how to [harvest rhubarb](#).

## Herbs

Basil, cilantro, sage, rosemary. These are all popular with both chefs and home cooks. Most herb plants offer multiple harvests and require minimal space. You can grow them alongside other high-yield crops, as well. If you have an overflow of herbs, it's also possible to dehydrate them and sell dried, packaged herbs to customers.

## Microgreens

Microgreens are a super-profitable greenhouse crop. They're also incredibly easy to grow and provide a hefty return. You don't even need a greenhouse to get started with growing microgreens, but a dedicated space is definitely an advantage. It takes less than a month to grow a tray of microgreens so you can harvest A LOT during a season. They also fetch a high price per pound. People love them because they're tasty and nutritious. The drawback of this crop, though, is the short shelf life.

## Things to consider before jumping right in

Of course, starting a hobby farm business and selling profitable greenhouse crops is a bit more complicated than selecting high-value plants. **You can't sell produce without a**

**buyer.** Who will buy your plants? Will you sell directly to a local restaurant? Or do you plan to set up at a farmer's market? Considering demand is vital. Don't choose what to grow before you fully understand what your buyer wants. If your goal is to sell to a local restaurateur, have a chat and ask about what they might need then plant accordingly.

Think also about **how long individual plants take to mature.** Tomatoes are popular at farmer's markets, but they also require a long growing season and take up a significant amount of space. Does it make sense to focus on this crop if you have a tiny greenhouse space? Or should you focus on [quick-growing](#) plants that will yield multiple harvests and provide more opportunities for income?

**Don't forget to factor in the effort required to grow plants.** Certain types of produce require a lot more effort to grow than others. Many greens, for instance, don't require a lot of babysitting, but eggplants and tomatoes need a lot more TLC.

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## **The No-Cost Way to Increased Tomato Yields: Pruning**



Hi, everyone! Apologies for the late posting.

I've known what I wanted to talk about this week for a while, but honestly, it's tough to explain it well without a visual aid. Pruning tomatoes is one of the tasks that I either excel at or fail miserably to keep up with. I'm either diligent in staking, pruning, and keeping my tomatoes organized and tidy or I forget to stay on top of the chore and end up with sprawling plants.

Here's an excellent pruning guide to help you out with the task this summer:

Different gardeners have different pruning preferences. You can choose to lightly prune your plants or aggressively remove branches as you see fit. With a bit of trial and error, you'll find a method that works for you.

## Why prune tomatoes?

There are a few reasons to keep up with this garden chore:

- **Prevents disease:** Let your tomato plants sprawl on the ground, and they're more likely to pick up disease from contaminated soil.
- **Improves air circulation:** This is especially true if you're planting things closely together (like I do with the Square Foot Gardening method).
- **Better yield:** If your tomato plant is busy throwing its energy into growing big, green leaves, you'll undoubtedly have fewer tomatoes. Pruning help re-route that energy to where it matters: growing big juicy tomatoes!
- **Controls growth:** Pruning prevents your plants from getting out of control, which allows for easier upkeep and maintenance. If your plant growth is left unchecked, foliage may shade nearby plants and completely block the sun for newly emerging seedlings. Pruning regularly also allows you the opportunity to inspect your plants carefully.

## When should I not prune?

Don't bother pruning determinate tomato plants – these are varieties that set all their fruit at once. Pruning will significantly lower your yield.

If you don't feel like pruning, don't bother. There's no rule that says you NEED to. Sure, there are benefits, but you can also grow tasty tomatoes without the effort of pruning.