



PIXABAY.COM

Determinate tomato plants, also known as bush tomatoes, have a compact growth habit and typically only grow to be 2-4 feet tall. They produce all of their fruit within a relatively short period — usually a few weeks to a month.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BONNIE COURTER

Indeterminate tomato plants, also known as vining tomatoes, have a sprawling habit and can grow to be quite tall — up to 10 feet or more in some cases. One advantage of indeterminate tomato plants is their long and continuous fruit production.

## ASK A MASTER GARDENER

# Indeterminate *and* determinate **tomatoes**

**QUESTION:** I bought many beautiful and healthy-looking tomato plants at a plant sale hosted by Master Gardeners. The Master Gardeners were so helpful in helping me select plants that would grow well in our area. However, now that my plants are home and I have been carefully reading the plant tags, I have a question. What is the difference between indeterminate and determinate tomato plants?

**ANSWER:** Indeterminate tomato plants, also known as vining tomatoes, have a sprawling habit and can grow to be quite tall — up to 10 feet or more in some cases. They continue to grow and produce fruit throughout the growing season until the first frost. On average, in Roseburg, Nov. 5 is the first frost date.

Most beefsteak and cherry tomatoes are indeterminate.

On the other hand, determinate tomato plants, also known as bush tomatoes, have a more compact growth habit and typically only grow to be 2-4 feet tall. They produce all of their fruit within a relatively short period — usually a few weeks to a month — and then the plant stops growing. These plants are ideal for containers

and small spaces. Most paste tomatoes are determinate, which works well if you want to make sauce or do canning.

The tomatoes that you harvest are likely to be delicious regardless of the plant being indeterminate or determinate. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to both types of tomato plants.

One advantage of indeterminate tomato plants is their long and continuous fruit production. This means that you can enjoy fresh tomatoes throughout the growing season, rather than having to harvest all of the fruit at once.

Another advantage of indeterminate plants is that they are typically more disease-resistant than determinate plants. This is because they have a larger and more robust root system, which allows them to absorb more nutrients and water from the soil. This also means that indeterminate plants are generally more tolerant of drought conditions.

However, there are also some disadvantages to growing indeterminate tomato plants. Because they



**Linda Estep**  
Master Gardener

continue to grow and produce fruit throughout the growing season, they require more maintenance and attention than determinate plants. Indeterminate plants require staking or caging to support their growth and prevent the heavy fruit from toppling the plant.

This includes regular pruning to prevent the plant from becoming too bushy and to promote air circulation, which can help prevent disease.

Determinate tomato plants also have their advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that they require less maintenance. They do not require staking or caging because their shorter stature allows them to support themselves.

Also, because they produce all of their fruit within a relatively short period, they are ideal for gardeners who want to harvest a large quantity of tomatoes at once — for example, for canning or preserving.

However, the short growing season of determinate plants can also be a disadvantage. Once the plant has produced all of its fruit, it stops growing and dies back. This means

that gardeners who want fresh tomatoes throughout the growing season will need to plant multiple batches of determinate plants or have a mixture of both indeterminate and determinate plants.

Another disadvantage of determinate plants is that they are generally more susceptible to disease than indeterminate plants because they have a smaller root system.

If you have the space in your garden and the time to take care of it all, I personally think it is best to plant both indeterminate and determinate tomato plants. Experienced gardeners who plant tomatoes year after year, most likely have already discovered their favorite type of tomato plants, but if you are new to growing tomatoes, a mixture of indeterminate and determinate tomatoes will help you find your favorite.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the Oregon State University Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*