# Nurturing and Transplanting Tomato Suckers

By now, everyone is enjoying one of the greatest delights of a summer garden - the homegrown tomato. There simply is no better smell or taste than that of a vine ripened tomato that you have grown yourself. For many of us, the stimulation of these senses is directly linked to our memory of time spent in our grandparents' gardens seeing and enjoying the tomatoes. We could never seem to get enough! Soon, however, many of our plants will begin to decline and will need to be removed. Wouldn't it be great to extend the season for tomatoes and be able to enjoy them into September and even October? We can do just that and do it very cost-effectively by selecting, nurturing, and transplanting some of the suckers that are growing on the existing plants in our plots. It's also a great way to share some of your extra suckers with others who may need them.

Tomato suckers are stems that grow from the junction of the main growth stem and a leaf branch. They have leaves and if left on the plant will develop flowers and more fruit. Many gardeners recommend removal of most if not all suckers to allow more energy to be directed into the main stem and the fruit that will be growing on it. You may choose to leave some suckers on your plants for more production (albeit smaller tomatoes, generally) or for transplanting as we will describe in this article. Let's work with some tomato suckers!

There are some basic items you will need and just a few basic steps to follow in order to use the suckers to produce a second generation of plants from your first tomatoes. You will need to identify some nice healthy suckers on your plants and remove them. We like to select somewhat larger suckers, 8-12" long, which will need to be removed with shears or scissors.

The suckers should then be placed in a vase or other container with water covering most of the "stem." No fertilizer is necessary but a drop or two of fish emulsion would be fine. Place the container outdoors in a location with **indirect** sunlight only! After 10-14 days, you should see very fine, white roots growing from the stem. It's now time for step two---transplanting!

For this step you will need some 6-8" plastic containers, water (a spray bottle for misting is best), a small amount of organic fertilizer, and some light seed- starting or potting mix (note that some mixes have fertilizer in them , if yours does, do not add additional fertilizer). First, place a couple inches of mix in the pot and stir in a pinch or two of fertilizer, mist well with water, then holding the stem in the pot as deeply as possible, fill in with more soil mix and tamp down, lightly firming the soil around the stem and roots. Re-mist generously on the soil, wait a few minutes and re-mist again, then place the pot outdoors in an area of **indirect** sunlight for about 10-14 days. Now, on to the last step!

This is the step that we all have most likely done before. It's time to transplant into the garden. After selecting a spot and digging a hole slightly deeper than the length of the tomato's stem, mix in a small handful of organic fertilizer and a tablespoon of Epsom salt with some of the soil, then remove the transplant from the pot and place it deeply in the hole being sure to have several sets of leaves above ground level. It's ok to remove a side shoot or two prior to planting to increase the length of bare stem to be buried in the soil. Fill in with the remaining soil and firm up around the plant. Care for this transplant as you did your original tomato plants and in about 60-70 days you should have more of those delicious tomatoes to enjoy. Late in the season any remaining green tomatoes can be picked and used for fried green tomatoes or wrapped in newspaper and they will ripen over several days or weeks for further enjoyment.

Now is the time to begin your sucker transplanting procedures. Hopefully you will get a chance to try this method of extending your tomato season and enjoy good results with it. See you in the garden!

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