

U3A tomatoes,

1. Relax and enjoy, there is no prize for the first ripe tomato in Port Fairy, take your time to let nature proceed. The weather is your friend. Early spring is usually too cool to germinate your seeds, be patient and wait till mid spring. The seedlings in the shops or at the market have been raised in hot houses or artificially heated seed beds indoors.
2. Pick your best tomato, an early one, true to form, tasty and good size, allow it to fully ripen on the bush. Don't wait till the end of the season to collect seed, do it while the fruit is in its prime.
3. Collect the seeds and dry fully on paper towell(the pulp around the seed can be washed off in a fine kitchen sieve with water, enjoy the beautiful taste of your best fresh tomato.
4. Save the dry seed in a cool dry spot in a paper bag or envelope. Remember to label it bag.
5. Seed raising mix- one part good quality commercial seed raising mix, one part good quality potting mix sieved to remove lumps , one part of you fine home compost sieved to remove lumps. Mix well to ensure even mix without any large clumps or lumps.
6. Spread a seed tray with seed raising mix. Lay out rows of tomato seeds onto the seed raising mix and lightly sprinkle more seed raising mix on top. Spray lightly with water to keep the soil moist while waiting for germination. Keep the tray in a warm, lightly shaded spot. No need for glass houses or heated seed raising beds.
7. Water regularly in the seed tray while waiting for the second set of leaves to form fully(about 30-50mm depending on the tomato variety).
8. Fill a small pot with equal parts seed raising mixture from step 5 and your best fine compost. Using a small spoon or stick gently lift a single seedling from the seed tray and transfer to a small pot. Take care of the roots by placing the seedling in a hole about the same size as the stem and carefully backfilling. Water in and watch it grow, be patient.
9. When the seedling has a strong stem and is branching(100-200mm tall, depending on the tomato variety) transfer it to a sunny position in the ground. Work compost into the soil and plant deeply, about half way up the main stem.
10. Watch your plant grow with regular watering and feeding of seaweed. February tomatoes ripened on the bush are the tastiest. Collect seed from the best early tasty fruit. See step 1. Eat and enjoy with gratitude. Collect a variety of tomato types by swapping seed with friends or U3A propagators.

If all else fails make friends with the U3A propagators, they all propagate too many seedling and are happy to share.

Greg Walker