Tomato ripening and holding

One of the most popular garden plants is the tomato. There’s nothing quite like a healthy tomato plant laden with ripening fruit. For many gardeners, now is the time they experience peak production.

Often, gardeners are looking for that rich, red color before harvesting the fruit, but did you know tomatoes ripen from the inside out? They ripen rapidly at temperatures around 72 degrees Fahrenheit and store well at 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Green tomatoes can be picked and held at 55 degrees Fahrenheit, and they will go ahead and complete the ripening process over time.

In the horticulture world, a vine-ripened tomato is one that’s picked when a pinkish color first shows at the blossom end. This helps them get that good red color development. The heat of July and August in Oklahoma is no joke. Tomatoes left on the vine to ripen in the heat typically turn red-orange in color. Picking them earlier and placing them in a cooler environment is what will help them develop that red color we all associate with vine-ripened tomatoes.

Once the tomatoes are removed from the vine, store them indoors. Put the fruit in a single layer, about 2 inches to 3 inches apart, in a cardboard box. By leaving room around each tomato, you’re cutting down on the chances of spreading rot.

As a tomato ripens, it decreases in tannins, which are responsible for the sourness of green tomatoes. Ethylene gas is present in aging fruits and helps break down the cell membranes, resulting in a softer tomato.

Picking them early also reduces the chances for fruit cracking, as well as garden loss due to birds, worms, sun scald and other causes.

Once the tomatoes are ripe, store them at room temperature for the best flavor. Avoid putting them in the refrigerator. Temperatures below 55 degrees Fahrenheit are damaging to the fruit.

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