



A program of **CLIMATE ACTION EVANSTON**

Prepping and Planting

Edible Evanston's Vision:
Inspiring and supporting a culture
of sustainable food growing and
sharing throughout the Evanston
community

New Gardeners Class Series

May 2025

What we're covering

- Bed preparation
- Soil preparation
- Planting styles
- Direct sow vs seedlings

Bed Preparation

Why your bed matters

- Reduce weeds
- Defining your garden edges
- Improve soil- texture, nutrients, and moisture
- Accessibility, aesthetics, protection

Bed types

- Raised bed vs inground
- Till vs no-till



Is a raised bed right for you?

Raised Bed Pros

- Drains better
- Warms up faster
- Helps areas which flood
- Looks “neater”
- Deters critters and dogs—a bit
- Heavy metals/contaminants
- Possibly less bending down

Raised Bed Cons

- Dries out faster
- Cools down farther/faster
- Can encourage slugs
- Extra expense
- Hard to source enough good soil
- Maintenance/ repair



Till vs No Till



Traditional Tilling

- Till every Spring
- Add fertilizer and compost, work it into the top few inches of soil
- Rake smooth
- Plant seeds and seedlings
- Releases carbon into the atmosphere

No Till

- Pull or smother all existing weeds
- Remove old crops (leaving roots is okay)
- Add 2 inches or more of fresh compost to the surface
- Plant directly into new compost
- Keeps carbon in the ground

No-till method to create a new bed

Don't dig it up or remove turf!

“Lasagna mulch” it

- Mow close
- Cover with cardboard (no plastic tape!) or newspaper and wet thoroughly
- Cover that with a couple inches of compost or leaf mulch

Better compost=Better, faster results



Soil Preparation

Improve the soil through:

- Texture
- Moisture
- Nutrition



Soil is **ALIVE!** A soil's microbiome is all the living microorganisms in soil—critters, bacteria, fungus—all forming an ecosystem that will include your plants. Supporting the microbiome will support your garden.

Planting styles

What's your style?

- Rows- described on seed packs
- “Square foot”- an approach originally for raised beds, but can be applied anywhere
- Polyculture- planting various plants together in a single space



Spacing

Consider size of mature plant- both above and below ground.

Tighter spacing can lead to adult stunting

Intensive options



- Tightly packed
- Cut and come again
- Vertical
- Succession planting
- Interplanting
- Companion planting

Direct sow seeds vs transplanting seedlings

Seedlings

- Easier to space your plants
- “Jump start” on the season
- Easier to protect from pests
- Transplant shock can slow it down

*Starting seeds inside is an advanced skill

*Buying seedlings- expensive and limited selection. Possibility of introducing diseases.

Direct sow seeds

- Easy to do
- Cheapest option
- Plants will be well adapted to their location
- Widest selection of varieties
- Poor germination may leave bare spots
- Hard to tell if you have good quality seeds

Which plants like which?

Direct Sow

- Cucumbers
- Squash
- Carrots
- Radishes
- Melons
- Cilantro

Seedlings

- Eggplant
- Tomato
- Pepper
- Stevia
- Basil, thyme, rosemary, oregano

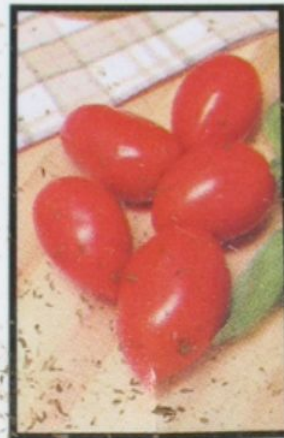
How to read a plant label

Variety

Disease
Resistance

Uses

ROMA



TOMATO

VF Pear- or plum-shaped fruit, solid with few seeds. Many uses.

MAT: 76 days.

HOW TO GROW:

Plant in full sun 24-36" (61-91 cm) apart in rows 36-48" (91-122 cm) apart.

Days to
maturity

Sunlight

Spacing

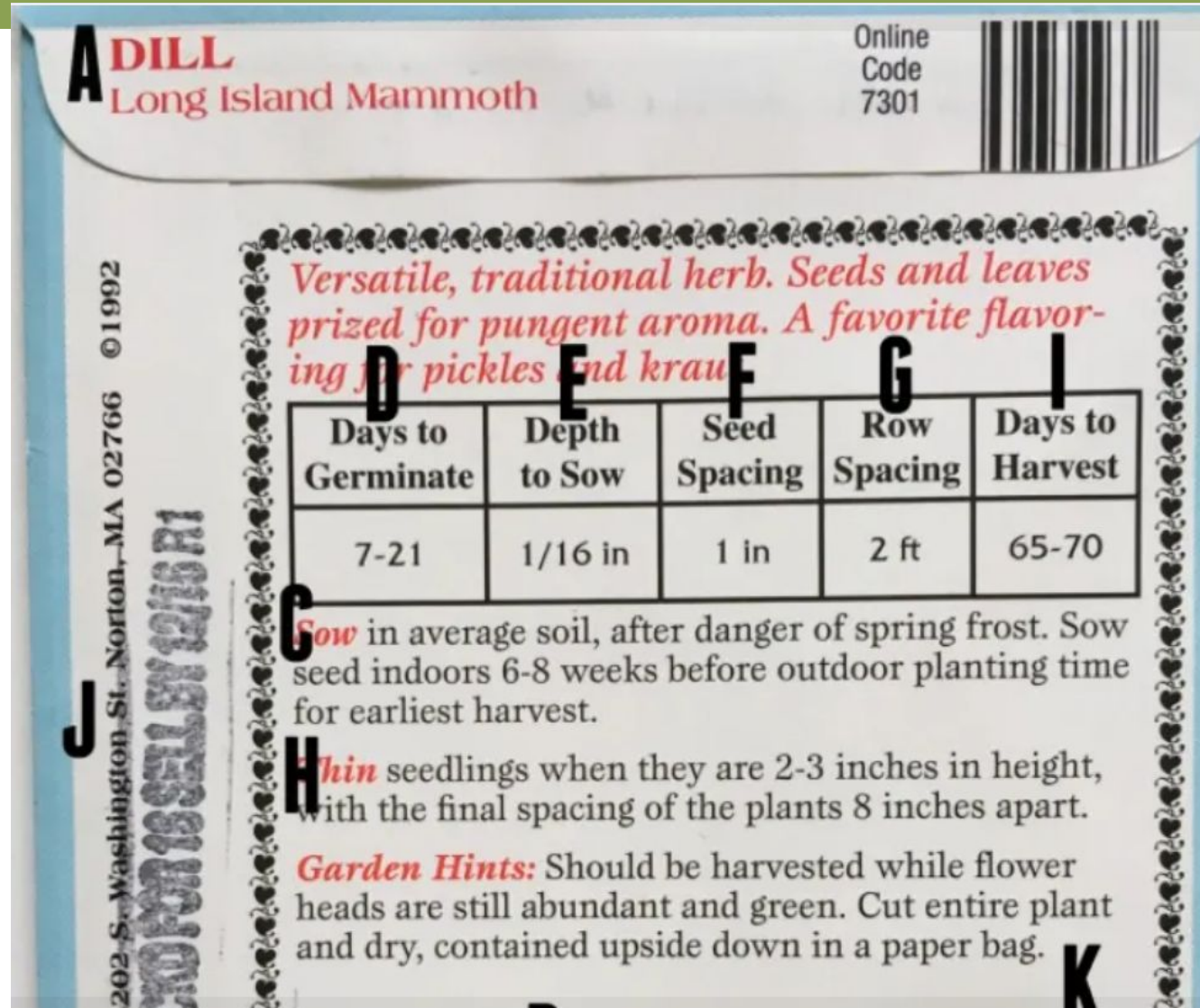
Picking a healthy seedling

When buying a seedling, try to select the best one:

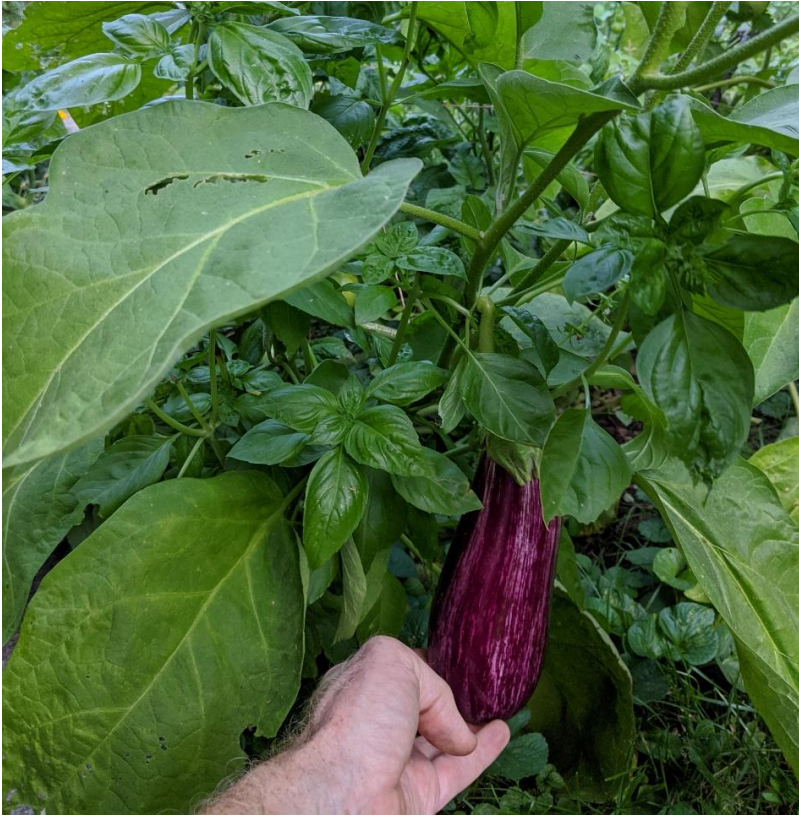
- No flowers or buds
- Short and stocky
- Check for healthy roots?
- Green to dark green leaves
- Signs of pests- webs, nibbled leaves, bugs



How to read a seed packet

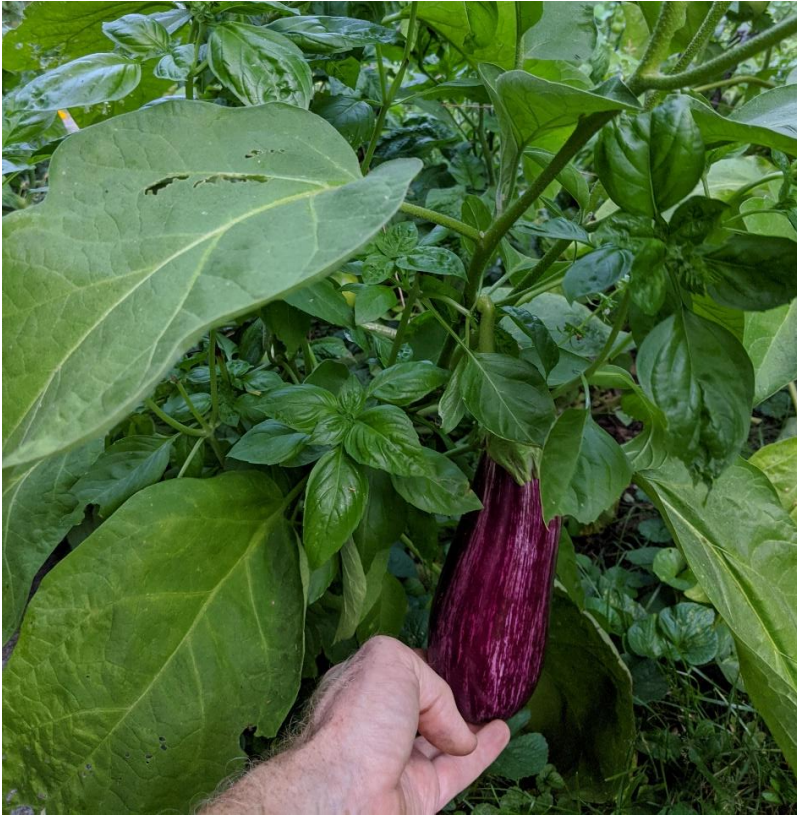


Tips for garden favorites



- Install all infrastructure ahead of time. Trying to put a watering system in around seedlings is difficult.
- Tomatoes- plant deeply. One of the few plants that will produce roots off the stem
- Older seeds can be planted, but will have poorer germination (so plant more than you need!)

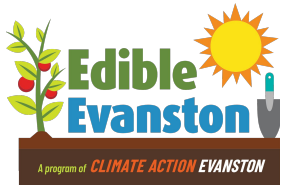
Tips for garden favorites



- Grow a variety of plants so that if it is an off year for one, you'll get a good crop of something else
- Try to respond to problems quickly
- Plant taller plants on the north side of shorter plants (light)
- Plant seedlings out on a cloudy day
- Be ready for the unexpected!

What will success look like for you?

Some things will not work out in your garden. What will make you want to come back to gardening next year? Are you growing for fresh eating? Are you trying to save money on groceries? Preservation? To teach others about healthy food? Can you grow some extra to share or donate? Or are you just looking for an excuse to get outside?



Q&A

