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3166 Willow Creek Road, Prescott
www.mortimer-nursery.com
776-8000 / info@mortimer-nursery.com

Planting Early Tomatoes: "It's in the Bag"!!

When tomato plants first appear in garden shops, it is much too early to set them out in the garden, so if you buy them early, you must put them in a sunny, protected place to harden them off. (A small plant from a six pack will produce just as many tomatoes as one purchased as a 1-gallon size so if you need more than one or two plants, it is more economical to get six packs).

Try replanting young tomato plants directly from the plastic six-pack container into paper bags filled with good garden soil and let them grow in the bags until it is time to plant them out. Then just plant the bags containing the young plants, which will have grown quite a bit in size, directly into the garden. This way you can plant them without disturbing the roots. Leave about a half-inch of the bag protruding out of the ground to protect the tomatoes from cutworms.

Use regular paper 'lunch bags' for the little plants. Fold the bags down about an inch to provide a little extra stability, and then fill them with garden soil to within a couple inches of the top. (Place the tomato plants deep enough in the bags so that soil covers all but the top leaves. Roots will grow from the buried stems providing a very sturdy plant.)

Place the bags in one gallon nursery pots to give them extra stability during their hardening off time. Put flats of plants out in a sunny, warm place during the day (bringing them into a garage or other protected place at night) until all danger of frost has passed, and then plant them directly into the garden. Although the bags become discolored from watering during this time, they will disintegrate quickly.

This Garden Tip is information taken from a Cochise County Master Gardener Newsletter and it is worth trying out!

