

Upside-down tomatoes

Spring fever is everywhere—and so are gardening commercials on TV.

One of the most popular commercials now is a kit where you grow tomatoes upside down in hanging baskets. In advertisements, Topsy Turvy and similar products have been called the “most ingenious innovation for growing tomatoes” and the “world’s easiest way to grow tomatoes.”

These advertisements are laughable. They claim tomato plants benefit because gravity pulls water from the pot to the fruits. Tomato plants don’t need this help. They have been pumping water from the soil to their fruits for millions of years before this remarkable “innovation”.

Advertisements claim the root system “explodes” and thrives in the planter. Sorry, this is not true. The root system gets *suppressed* by the planter. Tomatoes grown in the ground naturally develop a *larger* root system—three feet or more in diameter.

Gardeners I’ve talked to in North Dakota have mixed feelings about this planter. Yes, it works, but it is not amazing. Keep in mind that if growing tomatoes upside down was the best way to grow tomatoes, we would have hundreds of acres of upside-down tomato vines grown by farmers. The last time I checked, there were approximately *zero* acres of upside-down tomatoes in commercial production.

Also, it is windy in North Dakota (excuse me for stating the obvious). There is a risk of the tomatoes falling off the wind-blown plants before the fruits fully ripen.

Watering is always a critical issue when growing plants in a hanging basket. In the case of tomatoes, your fruits will be more susceptible to cracking when grown in a basket.

We already mentioned how growing the tomato in the pot will suppress its root development. This will limit the ability of the vine to find the nutrients and water it needs. Tomatoes grown in baskets have a much higher probability of developing blossom end rot compared to tomatoes grown in the garden.

This latest craze of growing tomatoes in containers has led to the release of new varieties suitable for growing in hanging baskets. ‘Terenzo’ and ‘Lizzano’ are All-America Selections released in 2011. They produce cherry tomatoes on short vines that tumble over the edges of hanging baskets.



If your space is limited for growing tomatoes, consider getting a big pot and planting the variety ‘Patio’. It will produce a decent crop of 2-inch tomatoes. They ripen early and you will be pleased with the quality. Place some straw or wood mulch over the base of the soil in the pot to conserve moisture and reduce disease problems. In raised beds, ‘Patio’ does well without staking, as does ‘Roma’, a paste type that is extremely easy to grow.

Lastly, don’t get me wrong. Growing tomatoes upside down can be *fun*—and having fun is important—but be cautious anytime you hear about “revolutionary” gardening products this time of year. *DG*

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Published April 2010
Revised November 2011