

SHEPHERD YOUR PHLOX

Phlox make fabulous garden scenery until powdery mildew blights the greenery and makes the leaves yellow and fall off.

Fortunately, you can still grow great garden phlox (*P. paniculata*) by taking a few precautions. Start with disease-resistant varieties. At the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, Illinois, Plant Evaluation Manager Richard Hawke tests for the best.

Topping Richard's recommendations for Midwest gardens is 'Shortwood', which has been mildew-free in seven years of trials. At 4 feet, it's not short (it's named for a garden). It's topped with showy clusters of pink flowers that have dark pink eyes.

In Richard's earlier trials, which compared 20 phlox varieties, 'Katherine', about 3 feet tall with lilac flowers, was the winner. "It remains an excellent performer," he says.

If you have mildew-prone phlox that don't want to replace, thin each plant to no more than five shoots to improve air circulation. Water when the ground is dry, but don't let water fall on the foliage. Clean up and destroy plant debris every autumn.

and

Three questions about tomatoes

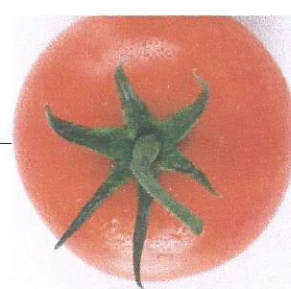
Seed Savers Heritage Farm (www.seedsavers.org) in Decorah, Iowa, grows 500 varieties of heirloom tomatoes every summer. We asked Diane Ott Whealy, Seed Savers' cofounder and associate director, for advice on growing your best tomatoes.

Q>>You space your tomato plants 4 or 5 feet apart. Why?

Diane>>It's best to have good air circulation around the plants to keep them dry. Blight is more apt to occur when there's moisture on the plants. It's hard to think about spacing when you start out with a 3-inch plant, but it's going to be a monster.

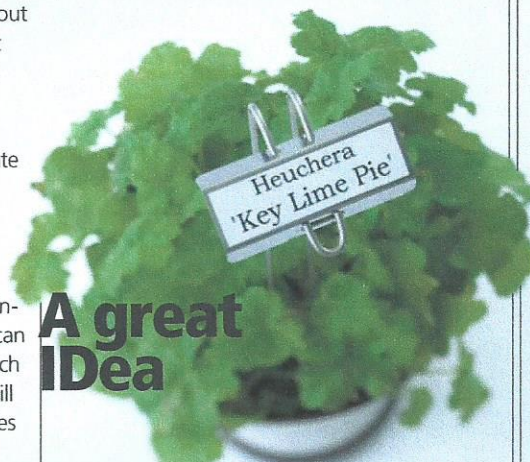
Q>>Why do you recommend growing indeterminate tomatoes?

Diane>>Indeterminate tomatoes keep producing fruit until frost. Since they keep growing, the tops of indeterminate tomato plants can often outgrow a disease such as tomato wilt that might kill smaller, determinate varieties that only set fruit once.



Q>>Why save seeds and start your own instead of buying plants from a garden center?

Diane>>Three reasons. Saving seeds from the best plants each year adds to the strength of each kind of tomato. The 'German Pink' tomatoes in my garden, for example, have been grown in northeast Iowa for 85 years and are now well-adapted and virtually trouble-free. Second, if it's a seed that was kept by your family, it's a good way to pass the tradition to another generation. Finally, if you've mastered the art of starting tomatoes from seed, it opens up more options in shapes, colors and varieties than just relying on what's in your local nursery.



A great Idea

Gary Kincaid makes what he calls "bomb-proof" plant-identification markers.

The retired Missouri engineer's markers, made of stainless steel, have heavy, 10-gauge posts and plates that are removable but can't get accidentally knocked off. The plates are positioned at an easy-viewing angle.

Gary doesn't provide the labels, but he recommends the Brother labeling system with TZ-style tape. His labels still look almost new after eight years of use in an extensive iris collection, he says.

Kincaid Gardens markers come in three heights: 10, 15 and 20 inches tall. For information or to order (\$28.35, plus shipping for 25 15-inch markers): 816/324-4931; www.kincaidgardens.com. ■

