

# Dry Farm Tomatoes Offer More Flavor

Looking for sweeter, more intensely flavored tomatoes? Dry farming might be the answer. This hands-off method allows you to grow produce without irrigation. It's a common strategy in arid regions with limited water access, though it requires prep work to improve soil health for water retention.

The premise is simple—water stress can enhance flavor concentration. However, while dry-farmed tomatoes are sweeter, the plants generally produce lower yields. Each grower will have their own view on whether this tradeoff is worth it.

While grains and beans are the most traditional dry farming options, farmers also achieve success with grapes, garlic, pumpkins, and even watermelons. The Hopi people of Arizona relied on dry farming for two thousand years across a region that receives less than 10 in. of rain annually. The method became popular in the Great Plains around the 19th century. It's also gained popularity in the Mediterranean and the Sahel region of Africa. This farming technique is already common in California and is growing in popularity throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Dry farming tomatoes is suitable for both large-scale farms and backyard gardens. Low-yield varieties like cherry or paste tend to perform best, as they need less water overall. Equally important is healthy soil, since each 1% increase in soil organic matter can boost water retention by 16,000 gal. per acre-foot of water used.

Some soils have a high water-holding capacity, allowing them to retain a foot of water in the top 5 ft. of soil. That provides easy access for plant roots. Clay or loam soils are ideal because they hold onto spring moisture. Sandy soils tend to lose water too quickly, which can harm the plant's ability to thrive.

The first step is preparing the soil with cover crops. These help boost soil biomass and draw nutrients toward the surface while protecting the soil from moisture loss.

For direct seeding, plant the seeds deep in the soil to improve their access to water and encourage a strong root system. Dry-farmed tomatoes should be spaced 12 to 18 in. apart. You can plant multiple seeds per hole. If



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you're planting seedlings, do so close to the last spring frost so the soil remains relatively moist. The plant roots will grow to find water as the top layers start to dry out. Mulching around the plant bases can also help conserve moisture.

Many farmers use a single deep irrigation when transplanting. However, once the plants are in the ground, they're no longer watered.

Dry farming carries inherent risks, as plants can have difficulty getting enough nutrients when the soil surface dries out. A common issue is calcium deficiency, which can cause blossom end rot in tomatoes. Mixing compost about a foot deep into the soil helps roots access nutrients better. Another strategy is to place windbreaks near crops to reduce soil moisture loss.

While dry farming is possible in a raised bed, a few extra precautions are necessary. Adding plenty of compost and mulch helps maintain moisture levels within the raised bed. Cover cropping also helps maintain moisture levels. Likewise, avoid any weed cloth or barriers underneath the raised beds that might block roots from reaching water.

For long-term success, save seeds from your top-performing plants. This helps plant genetics improve over generations, allowing them to better thrive in dry farming conditions.



Arrowlock 88 is the industry's first manual cattle headgate that applies more pressure than most hydraulic chutes.

## Innovative Manual Headgate Designed To Last

Cattle headgates are essential tools for safely and efficiently managing animals of all sizes. Most models haven't changed dramatically over the years, as they mainly perform basic tasks, though operators sometimes become frustrated by their limitations. In extreme cases, injuries or worse can occur.

Arrowquip recently introduced its Arrowlock 88 headgate, featuring a durable, straight-cut ratchet-and-pawl design instead of the common beveled style. A unique handle adjustment option has also been added to provide increased force.

"Many ratchet and pawl units are cut on a bevel, making them high-wear and susceptible to tooth breakage," says Arrowquip product specialist Steve Langrell. "Ours are different in that they're cut straight. The more force the animal exerts on the headgate, the more it pushes into the supported tooth. They won't break for thousands of cycles."

The Arrowlock 88 is the industry's first manual cattle headgate that applies more pressure than most hydraulic chutes. It features three easily interchangeable handle settings (cow, calf and bull) to securely hold animals of all sizes. Simply adjust the pivot point by removing a single pin, moving the

handle to a new setting, and replacing the pin.

"We refer to it as approaching over-center design," Langrell says. "It's quick and easy to use with extra power to exert an increase of force. The design gives the headgate quickness with very little handle movement. As the handle slows, the power curve goes up."

The headgate also features a control bar running parallel to the chute body, allowing the handle to be operated safely from the front to the back and anywhere in between.

Langrell explains that most of a typical herd can be securely caught and held using the "cow" setting, so constant adjustments aren't necessary. When handling small calves or restraining large bulls, the quick handle adjustment will do the job.

"People with limited strength can easily operate this chute and headgate, restraining large or small animals," Langrell says. "Plus, it leaves the operator feeling less fatigued at the end of the day."

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## Second Harvest Redistributes Food Across Canada

Second Harvest, Canada's largest food rescue charity, operates throughout the supply chain to reduce edible food waste.

"The organization began in Toronto in 1985 when two friends, Ina Andre and Joan Clayton, noticed that perfectly good food from restaurants and grocery stores was being thrown away while people in their community were going hungry," says Maureen Kirkpatrick, Director of National Foodraising at Second Harvest. "They started picking up that food, loading it into a hatchback, and delivering it to local nonprofits."

Today, the organization is based in Etobicoke, Ontario, and operates in every Canadian province and territory.

"In 2024, we rescued and redistributed 87.1 million lbs. of surplus food, supporting more than 6.5 million people across Canada," Kirkpatrick says. "We're partnering with more farms every year, which means we can rescue more fresh, high-quality food right at the source."

Canada discards enough food for 17 million people every year. Meanwhile, the country has experienced a 90% increase in food bank visits since 2019, driven by rising inflation and housing costs. Second Harvest bridges the gap by acting as a logistics coordinator for

community groups and organizations. Farms, bakeries, grocery stores, and even restaurants contact the charity through its innovative app when they have surplus food. It then connects donors with recipients, ensuring smooth and efficient redistribution.

Second Harvest focuses on nutrient-rich, perishable food donations. In 2024, 43% of rescued food was fresh produce, 12% was dairy and dairy alternatives, 8.7% was meat, legumes and alternatives, and 11% was bread and grains. Still, Kirkpatrick notes that most food waste occurs before it even reaches the grocery store.

"There are losses during farming, storage and processing. Together, they account for 50% of all food waste. Farmers work hard to grow good food. When there's surplus left in the field or in storage, it shouldn't go to waste."

The organization accepts donations of all sizes—ranging from tractor-trailers to individual trays. Donors can use the app to specify when and what food they have available to donate. The Second Harvest team will pick up the food and find a non-profit, food bank, or other community group that can use it. It accepts nearly anything that humans can eat, with a few safety exceptions. This includes food from people's homes, food

that was plated or served (including salad bars), packaged food with broken seals, sushi, and prepared foods that have been in a temperature danger zone for two hours.

Second Harvest meets each farm's specific needs by coordinating logistics, arranging free pick-ups, and sourcing totes, pallets and other materials.

"Whenever possible, we strive to keep donations local so the food you grow can feed people right in your community," Kirkpatrick says.

Farmers will receive a donation receipt for eligible contributions and can claim a tax credit based on the donation's fair market value.

"It's an easy, practical way to reduce waste, recover some costs, and help nourish communities across Canada. Farmers are lifelines for communities and essential environmental stewards. Their hard work sustains people, protects the environment, and strengthens the economy."

To confirm whether Second Harvest operates in your area, contact the organization.

"While we've been able to rescue and redistribute so much of this good food to communities across the country, there's still so much that could be done," Kirkpatrick says. "Only 3.3% of surplus edible food is



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being rescued in Canada."

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