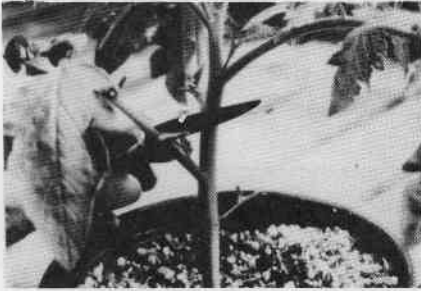# 11

Pruning, Staking, Tying

Producing container-size plants was thoroughly covered in the previous chapter. There are two special factors which are closely associated with growing large-size plants in containers which will be discussed in this chapter. These factors were omitted previously for fear of confusing the reader. The two factors are (1) pruning off suckers and (2) staking and tying grown plants in large-size containers.
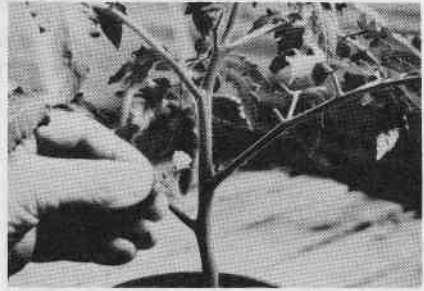
Suckers and Pruning

Tomato plants produce suckers at all stages of growth. Above every leaf node (the place where a leaf is attached to the stem) is a bud which is called a "sucker." When the plants are small and the older leaves are pinched off the first or second time, the suckers are barely visible and are usually not noticed. After the plants are shifted to 4-inch pots, the suckers are usually large enough to be seen. In gallon containers, the plants and the suckers grow more rapidly than they previously did.
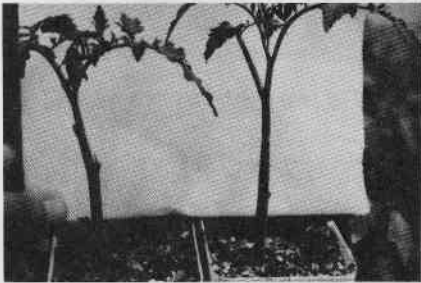
All suckers should be pruned from the plants as early as possible. This can be done either by rubbing them off by hand or by cutting them off with a knife. But remove only the suckers! *Do not* cut off the leaves or the flower buds.
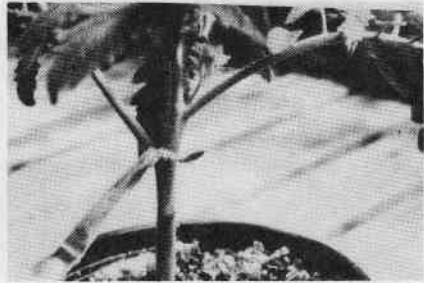
Use a knife to remove suckers.

A plant with suckers removed.

Tiny suckers are visible.

*Cut off suckers
as early as possible.*

Staking and Tying

Sturdy, large-stem tomato plants will stand upright, without support, until they are 14 to 18 inches tall. Plants which were started from seed and grown as outlined in this publication will reach this height in 9 to 10 weeks after the seeds have *sprouted*. Therefore, plants in gallon containers should be staked and tied when they are about 9 weeks old.

This means also that plants which have been *shifted* to gallon containers from smaller pots will require staking and tying within 2 or 3 weeks after they are shifted.

Here's how to stake tomato plants:

Step one: From willow trees, dowling rods, etc., cut off stakes 18 to 28 inches long and about ½-inch thick.

Step two: Insert one stake along the side of the plant stem in the gallon containers.

Step three: Cut strings 10 inches long, one for each plant.

Step four: Before the plant starts to fall over, tie a string securely to the *stake first,* and then tie the plant to the stake. Leave the string loose enough around the plant to allow the stem to enlarge as it grows.

Put the stake beside the plant.

Tie the plant to the stake.

*Stake the plants
while they're small.*

Staked plants in gallon pots.

Flower Set

Greenhouse tomato plants growing in cool temperatures will produce their first set of flower buds in approximately 4 to 5 weeks after the seed has sprouted.

If the plants have thick stems and are vigorous, the first set of flower buds will develop on the stem 8 to 12 inches above the soil level.

The height that the first flowers develop on the stem is governed by several factors such as fertilizing, light intensity, variety, growing temperature, drainage, soil oxygen, pruning, and depth of transplanting into pots and containers, etc.
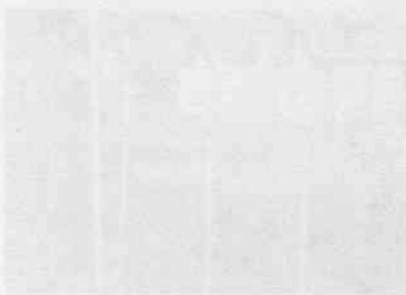
Leaves

Vigorous plants have large, deep-green colored leaves. The leaves are the most important vegetative part of the plant. They affect the yield, the size, the shape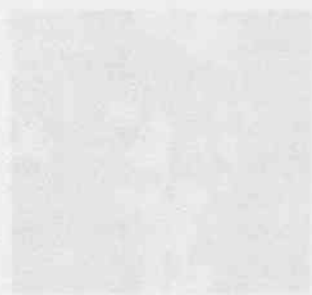, and the quality of the fruit.