Climate

Native to Mexico and Guatemala, tomatillos are sensitive to cold. The best growing conditions are 80 to 90°F days with 60 to 70°F nights, low humidity, and sparse rainfall.

Propagation

Tomatillos are normally planted as seed. About 2¼ oz of seed is sufficient to plant an acre.

Commercial operations in the United States use transplants. Tomatillos are seeded in a greenhouse and sold as 3-week old transplants. Cuttings can also be used as they root very easily.

Planting

Space ‘Rendidora’ 16 inches between the plants and 4 feet between the rows.

For other varieties, plant every 2 feet in
rows 5 feet apart. If you are starting with seeds, plant 3 or 4 tomatillo seeds 2 feet apart. When the plants reach 4 to 5 inches tall, thin them to one plant every 2 feet.

**Insects and diseases**

Tomatillos have only a few serious insect pests and diseases (Table 1). Insect pests include cutworms, root-knot nematode, tobacco budworm, and whiteflies. Common diseases are black spot and tobacco mosaic virus.

**Harvesting**

The plants begin bearing fruit 65 to 85 days after seeding or transplanting and continue for 1 to 2 months or until the first frost. The fruit are picked just as the husk, or calyx, bursts. If left on the plant too long, the flavor and quality will suffer.

Harvesting is done by hand, typically every day.

A plant may produce 60 to 200 fruits in a growing season (Fig. 1). An average yield is 2½ pounds per plant, or about 9 tons per acre.

In commercial operations, the tomatillos are placed in 10-pound cartons in the field. The fruit is then set out for 2 weeks to let the husks dry.

![Figure 1. A tomatillo plant can produce 60 to 200 fruits during a growing season.](image)
Storage

After the 2-week drying period, the cartons can be stacked and stored at 55 to 60°F and 85 to 90 percent humidity for up to 3 weeks.

Uses

Tomatillos are used primarily for fresh consumption. They are often used in soups and sauces, most notably in green sauces for Mexican and Guatemalan dishes. Some tomatillos are preserved as jam or canned whole for later use (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Tomatillos are often used in Mexican dishes, such as green sauces for enchiladas verde, and green salsa dips for chips.