

Top of the pots

'Tis the season for gardening and for gifting; here's a colourful way to combine both

My family has a gifting 'rule' for the presents we give at Christmas – they either need to be edible or something that grows. This avoids the unnecessary plastic and packaging of this time of year, which we've all experienced. For the past couple of years, I have grown tomato plants from seed and presented them in beautifully painted terracotta pots. It is such a personal gift – and environmentally friendly too. And who doesn't like homegrown tomatoes?

I customise my pots for each person by painting them in bright colours. If you're running short of time, buy established tomatoes from a plant centre – look for varieties that don't mind being planted in pots, such as 'Baxter's Bush' cherry tomatoes. The pot should have at least a 10-litre capacity.



STEP 1. Sow tomato seeds into seed trays or small pots filled with organic seed-raising mix 4 to 6 weeks before you intend to give them away. Water gently daily – tomato seeds are tiny and can easily wash away.

STEP 2. When the seedlings have their first two true leaves, carefully transplant the seedlings (only handling by the leaves, and not the stems or roots) and transplant into pots (I reuse leftover plastic ones from the garden centre) filled with soil, so the plants' stems and roots have space to develop further. Keep watering every day and looking after them until they've grown much taller.

STEP 3. When the stem is at least 15cm tall, it's ready to be transplanted into its terracotta pot.

STEP 4. Paint the inside of the pot in one coat of terracotta sealer (I used Resene Terracotta Sealer) and allow to dry.

STEP 5. Paint the outside of the pot in the desired colour (I used Resene testpots) and allow at least two hours to dry. Repeat and apply a second coat.

STEP 6. Paint the outside of the pot in a UV-protectant glaze such as Resene Clearcoat UVS and allow to dry.

STEP 7. Fill the pot halfway up with soil or potting mix. Remove the tomato plant carefully from its container. Soak the tomatoes roots in organic seaweed extract (available from garden centres, make sure you read the instructions on how to dilute) for two minutes. Add the tomato plant and then top up with soil/potting mix, burying the stem deep (which stimulates and creates new root growth).

STEP 8. Come Christmas, present your loved one with a homegrown gift that continues to give.

