

## Fresh Dirt

New garden joys every day



### [Homemade EarthTainers for your best tomato crop ever](#)

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When Ray Newstead isn't working at a Silicon Valley semiconductor company, he's growing tomatoes in containers he'd love you to copy ([free, full instructions](#) are posted on the [TomatoFest](#) website). Called the EarthTainer system, it combines hydroponic and conventional soil-based gardening principles to produce much earlier crops with only 25 percent of the water needed for in-the-ground tomatoes. And because plants are containerized, you can grow them on decks, balconies, roofs—anywhere there's sunshine for most of the day—and you never have to weed.

Newstead's system is similar to the commercial [Earthbox](#) system, but you make EarthTainers yourself at home with common off-the-shelf supplies sold by Home Depot and Lowe's. Each 31-gallon container is designed to grow two full-size tomato plants. Cost is about \$41, and construction time takes under 90 minutes with an electric drill and either heavy scissors or a jigsaw.

When Gary Ibsen (founder of the Carmel TomatoFest) learned about Newstead's system, he was so impressed that he teamed up with Newstead to make excellent how-to videos that are posted on the [TomatoFest.com](#) web site along with instructions in pdf format. As you watch the videos, you get the sense that Newstead is a do-it-yourself genius, and he makes everything he's learned easy for you to use. All he asks is that if you use his system, you make a donation to the [Feed the Children](#) organization.

I like the system because it lets you plant and harvest much earlier, so you can grow bigger, longer-season, indeterminate tomatoes in places where you wouldn't have risked it before. You can also grow other edible crops, caged or uncaged, with the same advantages. Go to [Sunset.com](#) for tomato variety suggestions and recipes.

