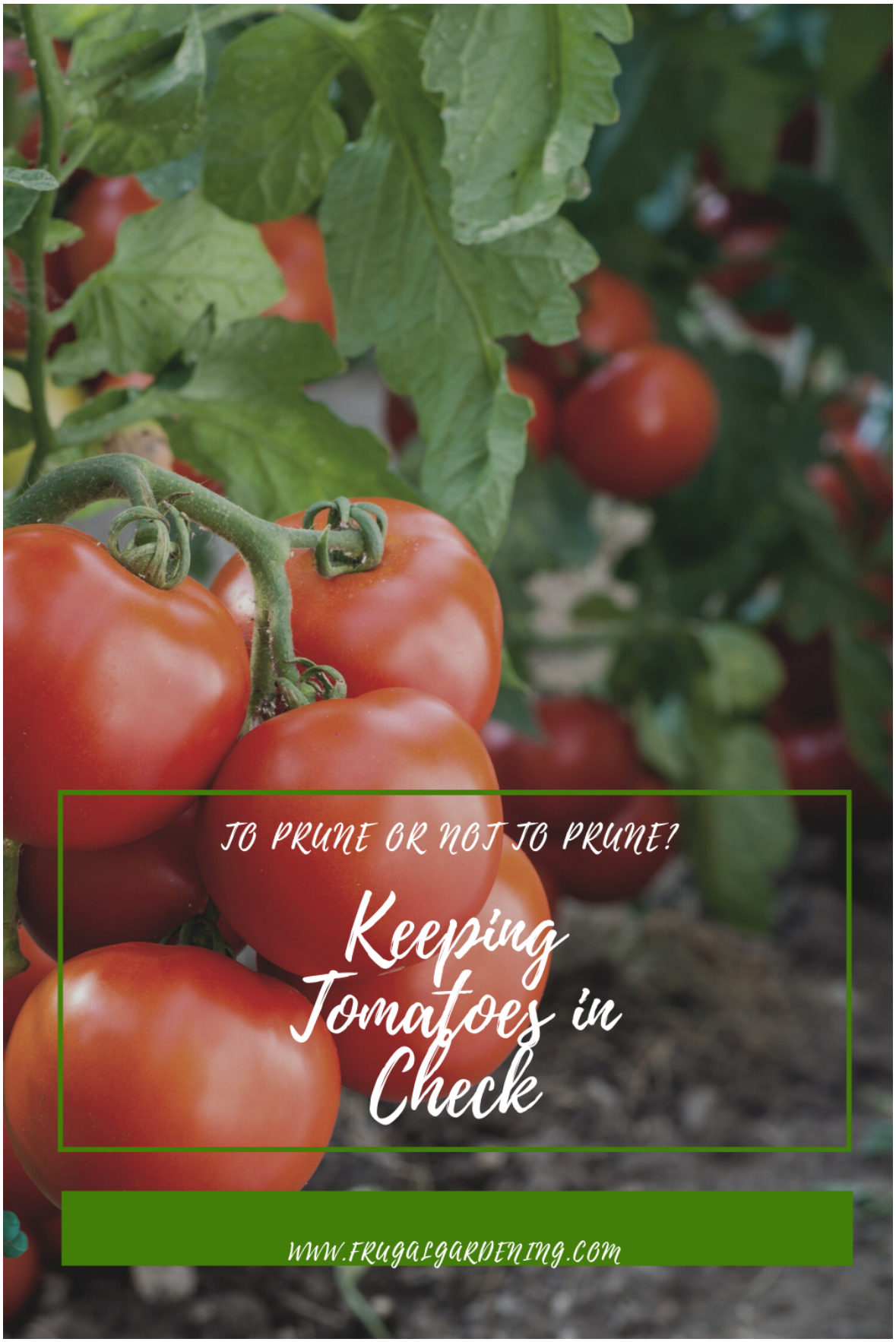
To Prune or Not to Prune? Keeping Tomatoes in Check



To prune or not to prune, that is the question! Tomatoes are one of the most popular garden plants for a reason. They're fairly easy to grow, produce an impressive yield, and are

available in many interesting varieties. There are many schools of thought when it comes to tomato pruning. So what's the right way to do things? Should you let tomatoes grow wild? Or keep them neat and tidy?

Tomato pruning

I believe that you should do what works for you. Whether you decide to prune heavily or not, you'll probably end up with at least some tomatoes if all other conditions are met. Pruning heavily results in a neat and tidy look. It ensures that most of the plant's energy goes into creating fruit.

But pruning aggressively can also be a lot of work. It requires paying close attention to your plants. I used to prune heavily, but now I'm a lot more laid back with it. Picking the suckers off is pretty easy to do, especially if you check on your plants regularly.

If even that sounds like a lot of work, choose tomato varieties that require no pruning, like compact and dwarf determinate varieties.

The dos and don'ts of pruning tomatoes

Here are things you should and shouldn't do when pruning tomatoes:

- **Do give tomatoes enough room to breathe**. Crowding plants reduces airflow and invites pests and disease. Pruning can help improve airflow and allow you to plant tomatoes closer to one another without suffocating plants.
- **Do keep enough foliage to protect the plant and fruits from sun damage**. Removing too much of a plant leaves it vulnerable to weather and sunburn. Instead, keep some leaves around for protection.
- **Do remove foliage that's touching the ground**. Soil keeps plants alive, but it's also a potential breeding ground

for all sorts of nefarious fungi and bacteria. So even if you're a lazy gardener, make sure to prune the lower leaves of a tomato plant to avoid potential contamination.

- **Do use cuttings to propagate new tomato plants**. Just because you've snipped off a branch doesn't mean you need to toss it into the compost. Instead, you can propagate a whole new tomato plant by placing the cutting in a cup of water. Within a week or so, you'll notice roots start to appear, and soon after, you can plant the cutting and enjoy a whole new tomato plant.
- **Don't prune determinate tomatoes**. Some pruning at the base of the plant may be required, but you should prune determinate tomatoes minimally. By removing stems and offshoots, you risk limiting your harvest.
- **Don't prune after rainfall when plants are still wet**. This is a good way to spread and introduce disease. Instead, wait till the plant is dry before pruning.
- **Do make sure to give support to tomato plants**. Whether you use bamboo poles or cages, tomatoes need support structures to stay upright. Plants that sprawl on the ground are more likely to pick up diseases.
- **Don't use inflexible ties**. You'll need ties to fix tomato plants to support to keep them from bending or toppling over. Use flexible ties to do the job to prevent damage to the stem as the plant grows.