

## Fall Tomatoes

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The tomato crop for most gardens in the San Antonio area this spring has been wonderful, especially if you used the recommended varieties HM 123, Tycoon, Red Deuce, BHN 968, Tastee Lee, Phoenix, Valley Cat, and Celebrity. They are all determinate varieties that quickly grew adequate foliage and then concentrated on setting fruit to beat the worst of the heat.

Now the major part of the yield is over and some of the plants may be infected with spider mites and/or fungal diseases. It is time to harvest the full-size fruit and let it finish ripening in the house. Pull the old plants. Discard them in the garbage or green recycling can if the plants have spider mites. Otherwise the spent plants can go in the compost pile.

Prepare the site for the new plants by incorporating 2 inches of compost and slow release lawn fertilizer (10 cups/ 100 sq. ft.) into the planting site. Generously irrigate the area 2 to 3 days before placing the transplants and then water them in with a hand wand. Gardeners with drip irrigation can place the transplants in the wet spot created by an emitter. I plant the tomatoes 3 feet apart in rows that are 3 feet apart. Place tomato cages over the plants and lay down a 2 inch layer of finely chopped mulch or live oak leaves.

Irrigate every day for 10 days and then every other day unless it rains more than a quarter inch. Fertilize around the plants every month with one-half cup of slow release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9 works well).

Three plants of the large varieties and one cherry tomato should provide plenty of tomatoes for salads and fresh cutting for a small family.

There will be a new cherry tomato on the market called Ruby Crush. It is a fast producing determinate variety like BHN 968 but supposedly produces even more tomatoes. Based on what BHN 968 produces if you have one or more Ruby Crush in your garden you may have to hire a full time tomato harvester. In addition to yield, a key factor on whether Ruby Crush will replace BHN 968 will be its taste. It is hard to believe it can taste as good as BHN 968.

If you grow some or all of your tomatoes in containers Ruby Crush and BHN 968 are two excellent choices. A half whiskey barrel size container with the plant supported by a tomato cage and fertilized with Osmocote is ideal but with close attention tomatoes can even be raised in a 5 gallon pail.

For a fast producing tomato that produces a larger fruit (larger than golf ball) plant some of the Roma Surprise transplants that will be available about August 1. They are excellent for canning and have been declared the best tasting Roma by Jerry Parsons and his tomato testing team.

In past growing seasons Tycoon and Red Deuce have been reliable producers of large tomatoes in the fall. They are both determinate heat-setters with an excellent record of beating the cold weather.

The performance of the Rodeo tomato, HM1823, this spring also makes me think it is worthwhile to plant as a fall tomato. In mine and other gardens, HM1823 was a slightly faster producer of large fruit than either Red Deuce or Tycoon. The taste was competitive.

Other varieties to consider for the fall tomato garden include Celebrity, Phoenix, 444, Bobcat, and Valley Cat. Valley Cat and Celebrity have nematode resistance. For a garden with a history of spider mite infestation use a weekly spray of 2 tablespoons of seaweed extract in a gallon of water sprayed under the foliage every week.

Begin planting the fall transplants now and have them all in place by mid-August.