

## Tycoon, Sunbrite, and Other Spring Tomatoes

Distribute 02-8-2018

Is Tycoon one of your favorite tomato varieties? You may want to obtain them early from your nursery because it looks like this will be the last year they are available, and there won't be many available this year. It is the situation we have discussed many times, Tycoon is a commercial hybrid that is no longer being produced. The seed company has decided that they need to come up with a replacement that will better meet the needs of the commercial producers who purchase the large percentage of the seed sales. If you are going to have Tycoons in the future, someone will have to collect seed from this year's crop.

Tycoons are at San Antonio area nurseries now, but it is too early to plant them in the garden. The plants might live but they won't grow. The dilemma is that if you don't obtain some of the few remaining plants, you may miss the chance for this year (forever?).

The answer is to purchase the plants you want for your garden but "pot them up" instead of planting them into the garden. Fill a one-gallon container with potting soil, fertilize with osmocote, and place the transplant in the container. The container is placed in the sun in a location sheltered from the wind and grows there until the air and soil warms up enough to support tomato growth. Depending how sheltered the growing spot is, you may have to move the plants in out of the cold if temperatures fall below 40 degrees at night. The key is to avoid subjecting the plants to any conditions that will "harden them off" (stop them from growing). Forty-degree weather for more than a few hours will harden the plants off.

Potted up tomatoes can be put into the garden after March 15 if it is a warm spring, or after April 1 if it stays cool.

One of the other tomato varieties available now is the Rodeo tomato, Sunbrite. It is the variety that performed best in the local tomato trials in the last year. It is a semi-determinate heat-setter which means the plant will quickly grow to its final size and then concentrate on setting fruit before the hot weather of the San Antonio summer shuts down fruit production. Sunbrite produces a large fruit on a well-leafed plant.

The Bexar County Master Gardeners will be selling Sunbrite at the Rodeo. Income from the sales of the tomato will be used to support the Junior Master Gardener Program. When Sunbrite becomes available at area nurseries some of the revenue will continue to be reserved for youth gardening. A superior variety supporting a good cause.

Prepare your bed for tomatoes by enriching it with 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) over every 100 sq. ft. The best way to irrigate is with drip irrigation. Mulch with live oak leaves or a bagged product to keep the soil moist. Productive tomato plants do best if they are supported by tomato cages. The cages can also be used to support agricultural fiber to shut out thrips and other disease-carrying insects. The fiber allows light in but reduces wind effects and provides some cold protection.

The fungicide chlorothalonil will stop development of early blight if it appears. Bt products will control caterpillars. If leaf-footed bugs become a problem, you may have to consider use of carbaryl or malathion. Spider mites are difficult to control but a preventative spray of 2 tbsp. of seaweed extract in water sprayed under the leaves every week can be used as a preventative.

Some tomato varieties are resistant to nematodes. If your garden or parts of the garden are infested with nematodes, plant nematode resistant varieties such as Tycoon, Valley Cat, Celebrity, and BHN 968.