**“Growing Tomatoes in San Antonio”**

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Tomatoes are the most popular garden vegetable. The keys to successful tomato growing include timing, variety selection, site preparation and pest control.

We plant tomato transplants in the garden on or after March 15 if the temperature has been warm. If it has been cold, wait until after April 1. April 15 is not too late

Plant tomatoes in raised beds in full sun. The site should be enriched with 2 inches of compost and 1 cup of slow release lawn fertilizer per 50 square feet of garden.

Plant tomatoes in the garden 3 feet apart. Tomatoes are not xeriscape plants so keep them well-watered. Drip irrigation is the best option. Surround the transplant with an aluminum or steel tomato cage to support the plant and fruit. Use live oak leaves for mulch over the root system.

Select a tomato variety that grows to its full size quickly and then concentrates on setting and maturing fruit before it becomes too hot in the summer. It will ideally finish it production by mid-July when it can be pulled and retired to the compost pile. Anew crop is planted in early August. Tomato plants that stay in the garden beyond July are more likely to produce fungal diseases and insects than more fruit.

Recommended varieties include Tycoon, Tigress, BHN 968 (cherry), Valley Cat, Solar Fire, Celebrity, 444 Red Deuce, Phoenix, and BHN 602.

 **‘Red Deuce’** tomato is the Rodeo Tomato for 2016 and new on the market for 2016. It is a determinate (quick maturing plant) selection that produces big yields of large to extra-large 10 oz. globe shaped fruit that have great eye-appeal and good eating quality. ‘Red Deuce’ has resistance to Verticillium Wilt, Fusarium Wilt (races 1, 2), Tobacco Mosaic Virus and Stemphylium.

Keep spider mites at bay by spraying seaweed extract and/or neem oil under the leaves every week. Confer with plantanswers.com if other insect or disease symptoms appear.

**“Tomatoes in Containers”**

Tomatoes make excellent container plants.

The first thing you need is a container. A five gallon, plastic bucket will work if you poke some half-inch holes in the bottom for drainage. Even better are the 15 gallon containers and larger food containers available at Costco for container gardening. A half whiskey barrel also is perfect for a tomato plant. The large soil reservoir means that you may not have to water every day and that there is less danger that the fruit laden plant will fall over in the wind.

Decorative containers also work well as long as they are large enough and have enough drainage holes.

Do not use regular soil from the backyard in the container. It does not drain as well and may be prone to compaction. You can add finished compost to the mix (20-30%) but the easiest soil to use is pure potting mix. It is sterilized and very well drained.

Unless it is a potting mix that has already had fertilizer added, potting mix is nutrient free. Even for pre-fertilized mixes incorporate Osmocote, or another slow release fertilizer formulated especially for containers at planting and then again in 4-6 weeks. Another option is to water with a water soluble fertilizer once per month after the initial fertilization.

Place the container in full sun out of the wind if possible. Full sun is the most important requirement, however.

Bury the root ball in the container and press the soil firmly around it. The newly planted tomato and the soil in its pot need to be soaked to the point of sogginess at planting. Water from the top until water emerges from the drain holes and then water again. After the initial watering, water every time the soil dries to the touch.

Support your tomato plant in a container with an aluminum tomato cage sized so it can be poked into the soil at the edge of the container.

 For your container tomato select one of the same determinate or semi-determinate varieties recommended for raised bed gardens. The variety named “Patio tomato” has attractive foliage but the fruit quality is low.