**Beat the Cold Weather, Plant Fall Tomatoes Now!**

In the July heat it is hard to think about cold weather but if you have planted fall tomatoes in past years and failed to harvest ripe fruit before cold weather destroyed the plants, you will want to consider “beating the cold” with the recommendations in this article.

By planting now, in July, you can harvest tomatoes before the weather becomes too cold for the plants.

The second key to raising and harvesting a full crop of vine-ripened tomatoes this fall, is to obtain the 2 fast-maturing varieties that are now on the market as transplants for this special “beat the cold weather tomato effort”.

Surefire is a well known fast-maturing tomato that was identified as a Rodeo tomato selection a number of years ago. It now qualifies as an heirloom tomato. The Surefire plants are heat-setting, fast-maturing producers of tennis ball size fruit. It has always been my favorite fall tomato.

Also available at area nurseries is a new selection identified as a good fall tomato choice is the Roma Surprise (also called 9881). It is another fast-maturing selection. Jerry Parsons and his Gardening Volunteers of South Texas plant study team assure me it is not your average Roma tomato, it tastes great!

To stay on the “beat the cold weather schedule” remove the weeds/grass, fertilize with 5 pounds of a 19-5-9 slow-release fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed, add at least two inches of compost over the entire growing area and incorporate it all into the soil.

Both of the fall tomato choices are determinate (small plants) so you can plant them relatively close together in the garden. Two feet between the plants works well.

The small size also makes them ideal to use as container plants. A half whiskey barrel size container works best but smaller containers work if you are conscientious in watering and fertilization with Osmocote and soluble fertilizer.

For more information on fall tomato culture, Surefire or Roma Surprise tomatoes and how to fend off insects with fabric on the tomato cages, visit plantanswers.com.