

# Spring Horticulture News Letter



2017

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI LIFE**  
EXTENSION



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Howdy!

*Well as usual, Winter in West Texas has been consistently inconsistent. We've had our usual two-three day cold snaps spaced in between mild to unusually warm weeks. Although it is not advised to begin putting seeds in the ground until Easter, this spring's newsletter has plenty of information to start your garden/landscape off on the right track.*

Caleb L. Eaton, CEA-Ag/NR



## PLANT TOMATO FROM SEED NOW FOR APRIL TRANSPLANT

BY: Jim Longstreet, Permian Basin Master Gardener

Now is the time to plant your tomato seeds inside to get ready for an April planting outside. That advice is for gardeners of the "set it and forget it" variety who do not want to worry about frost and are willing to wait for April 15 when the danger of frost is usually gone. But if you are diligent and conscientious and if you want a longer growing period for your plants to flower and set fruit, then you can courageously plant your tomato plants outside even now. By June 15 the morning lows are usually above 70 degrees when the larger tomato plants all but stop setting fruit for the summer. But if you plant now, you can usually more than double your yield than if you waited until April.

### TIPS FOR TOMATO GROWERS WHO PLANT NOW:

1. Cover your plants every night it is predicted to be in the 30s or less. You can use plastic buckets and/or plastic tarps. On successive days of freezing weather you can keep the tarp over the buckets. I have done so for as many as five days without ill effect. Be sure to have at least two layers of complete cover, or the part of the plant that touches the freezing plastic will die. On extra cold nights when it is down in the lower twenties it is a good idea to put under the tarp a heat source like a "trouble light" which can take the edge off. I usually put the light in a 5 gallon plastic bucket turned on its side so no water can get to the light. Be sure to run the electrical current through a relocatable power tap or surge strip just in case. Also be sure to uncover your garden when the sun comes up and it gets above freezing, or you can overheat your plants. Fortunately in Texas it is not illegal to kill a plant.
2. Make sure your soil has been significantly amended (enriched) with compost. Tomatoes are heavy users of soil nutrients and do not do well in our indigenous alkaline soil here in West Texas. Use as much compost as you can. My soil is at least 50% compost each
3. Don't over water or underwater. If you can stick your finger down in the soil a couple of inches and pull it out and see dark (brown) moist soil sticking to your finger, then it is moist enough. If you are able, use rainwater.
4. Choose a hybrid tomato that does well in this climate with strong disease resistances such as either Celebrity or Tycoon.
5. After the danger of frost (April 15) it is always best to cage your plants which will get them off the ground and prevent mold and rot. If you are a pro-active gardener and plant now, you will be eating your home-grown delicious tomatoes by the end of April with an oversupply to share with your grateful neighbors.

## SPRING & SUMMER VEGETABLE VARIETIES

BY: C.L. Eaton, County Extension Agent

Are you getting ready to plant a vegetable garden? Why not try some of these varieties. These varieties have been proven at both the local and state level to be successful for our hot and dry climate here in West Texas. Of course, these are not all of the vegetables and varieties that will grow here, but this list will get you started. For a complete list, see my sources or contact the Extension Office.



### LARGE TOMATOES

Celebrity  
Carnival  
Heatwave  
Quick Pick  
Brandywine (Heirloom)  
Cherokee Purple  
*SPRING TRANSPLANT: April 1-20*  
*FALL TRANSPLANT: July 1-25*



### SMALL TOMATOES

Yellow Pear  
Cherry Grande  
Small Fry  
Sunsugar  
Porter  
Sweet 100  
*SPRING TRANSPLANT: April 1-20*  
*FALL TRANSPLANT: July 1-25*



### HOT PEPPERS

Anaheim  
Jalapeno  
Texas A&M Mild Jalapeno  
Serrano  
Habanero  
*SPRING TRANSPLANT: April 10 - May 10*  
*FALL TRANSPLANT: June 15 - July 25*



### SWEET PEPPERS

Big Bertha (Green Bell)  
Jupiter (Red Bell)  
Summer Sweet (Yellow Bell)  
Golden Summer (Bell)  
Sweet Banana  
*SPRING TRANSPLANT: April 10 - May 10*  
*FALL TRANSPLANT: June 15 - July 25*



### OKRA

Lee  
Emerald  
Clemson Spineless  
Blondie  
Cajun Delight  
*SPRING: May 5 - June 5*  
*FALL: July 15 - August 15*

### SUMMER SQUASH

Senator (Zucchini)  
President (Zucchini)  
Dixie (Yellow)  
Multipik (Yellow)  
Peter Pan (Green Scallop)  
*SPRING: April 10 - May 25*  
*FALL: July 1 - August 10*



### CUCUMBERS

Homemade (Pickling)  
Sweet Success (Slicing)  
Sweet Slice (Slicing)  
Burpless (Slicing)  
County Fair (Both)  
*SPRING: April 15 - May 5*  
*FALL: August 1-15*



### SOUTHERN PEAS

Blackeye #5  
Mississippi Silver  
Zipper Cream  
Purple Hull  
Brown Sugar  
*SPRING: May 1 - 20*  
*FALL: July 1 - August 1*



### WATERMELON

Crimson Sweet  
Royal Jubilee  
Royal Sweet  
Orange Golden (Orange Flesh)  
Tri-X 313 (Seedless)  
*SPRING: April 20 - May 15*  
*FALL: June 15 - July 1*



### PUMPKINS

Connecticut Field (lg)  
Big Max (lg)  
Big Tom (lg)  
Small Sugar (sm)  
Jack Be Little (sm)  
*SPRING: April 20 - May 15*  
*FALL: June 15 - July 15*



### SOURCES

Permian Basin Master Gardeners: Vegetable Cultivars for the Permian Basin  
<http://westtexasgardening.org/VEGETABLECULTIVARS.pdf>

Aggie Horticulture Vegetable Variety Selector  
[http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/veg\\_variety/](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/veg_variety/)

## SYSTEMIC PESTISIDES ARE BEST OPTION FOR YEAR LONG PROTECTION

BY: C.L. Eaton, County Extension Agent – Agriculture/Natural Resources

Whenever spring and summer comes around, I begin to get phone calls from homeowners who are having pest problems with their trees. Scale (picture1&2), aphids (picture 3) and many other species are usually the main suspects. One of the best options to help homeowners protect their trees and shrubs from these pests are systemic pesticides.

When applied to pesticides, the term systemic means that the chemical is soluble enough in water that it can be absorbed by a plant and moved around in its tissues. Movement of systemic insecticides, like all transportable chemicals in the plant, takes place principally in the plant's vascular system.

These systemic products are usually soil applied. Pesticides that can be applied to the soil beneath a plant and transported in the xylem sap tissue can reach pests that are otherwise hard to kill. Many sap feeding insects, like scales, don't move around much and may be protected by wax, or by the plant itself, from insecticides sprayed on the leaves and stems. These insects do take in lots of plant sap during feeding, however, so a pesticide in the sap can be easily ingested by the pest.

When systemic pesticides are applied to the soil, beneficial insects, birds and even pets and people are much less likely to encounter the pesticide in the form of residues or spray drift. The treatment of some trees (for example the big oak over the swimming pool) would be difficult to do safely without a systemic pesticide option.

Some of the common house and garden insecticides that are systemic include acephate (Orthene®), imidacloprid (Bayer's Tree & Shrub Insect Control™, Merit®) and dinotefuran (Greenlight Tree and Shrub Insect Control™, Safari®). You should be especially careful when using systemics if you have a shallow water table under sandy soils, or if you are applying the product near streams, lakes or water features. As with all pesticides, it is important to read and follow the label of a systemic pesticide carefully at the time of purchase, before use, and before discarding any leftover containers or product.

Early spring is the ideal time to apply a systemic pesticide. If used properly and timely, systemic pesticides can help ensure a healthier tree and/or shrub throughout the growing season.

### SOURCES

<http://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/landscape/sapfeed/ent-6006/>



(1) Scale on leaves of trees/shrubs

*Pest problems  
with trees  
could be  
Scale....*



(2) Scale on trees/shrubs

*Or possible  
could be  
Aphids....*



(3) Aphids on leaf

### MARCH

- Finish pruning all shade trees and fruit trees before new growth begins. Remove dead, damaged and diseased branches, then crossing branches. Make cuts just outside the bark ridge collar, avoiding a flush cut. Pruning sealant is not needed, except with oak species.
- Rejuvenate shrubs by removing one third of the oldest branches at the base.
- Fertilize Pansies and other cool-season color plants during warm spells, with a complete water-soluble plant fertilizer or bloodmeal.

### APRIL

- Plant herb transplants early in the month including rosmaru, organo, thyme, sage, mint, bay, catnip, chives, fennel, scented geranium, germander, horehound, horseradish, lamb's ear, lemon verbena, Mexican mint mari-gold, santolina, summer savory, winter savory, tansy, yarrow and lavender.
- Plant flower seeds including ageratum, cockscomb, coleus, cosmos, marigold, moonflower, morning glory, periwinkle, petunia, portulaca, sunflower, vinca, verbena and zinnia.
- Plant bulbs including allium, alstroemeria, amarcrinum, amaryllis, caladium, calla, canna, dahlia, daylily, dietes, gladiolus, gloriosa, hosta, hymenocallis (spider lily), hypoxis, liriopie, monkey grass, rainlily, society garlic, tu-berose.
- Plant roses. Buy quality, top-grade plants and avoid those that have been indoors. They will not be acclimated to outdoor conditions. See additional information and pictures for Earthkind Roses at [westtexasgardening.org](http://westtexasgardening.org).

### MAY

- A wide variety of caterpillars may soon begin appearing throughout the garden. Check tender foliage on such plants as tomatoes and eggplants. *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt.) is safe biological control that works well on most larvae (worms).
- Aphids may cause sticky honeydew drips from tender new foliage, also from tree branches. New leaves may become puckered from their piercing and feeding. Control with insecticidal soap, Neem oil spray or general purpose organic or inorganic pesticides.



*Courtesy of Permian Basin Master Gardeners*