



PHOTOS BY **William M. Johnson**



March 09 2016



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.

Broccoli is a cool season vegetable that dependably produce in local gardens. However, as daytime temperatures have warmed over the past few weeks, many broccoli plants have produced beautiful displays of yellow flowers. That also means that the grower also missed a portion of their harvest as the flowers were produced from side sprouts which are quite tasty had they been harvested earlier in the season!

Q: My broccoli plants produced a bountiful display of yellow flowers. Why did this happen?

A: Broccoli is a cool season vegetable that dependably produce in local gardens. However, we have had some unusually warm days mixed with cool nights over the past few weeks and the

warm days stimulated broccoli plants to set beautiful displays of yellow flowers.

That also means that you missed a portion of your harvest as it is likely that the flowers were produced from the side sprouts which are quite tasty when harvested young!

Q: The citrus plants on sale at the Master Gardeners' Spring Plant Sale were well-taken care of. What's your recommendation for fertilizing citrus trees after I plant them in my landscape?

A: When it comes to fertilizing fruit trees, there are really three key questions



that one must answer: 1.) What should I use?, 2.) When should I use it? and 3.) How much should I use?

There are many, many fertilizer options available ranging from organic fertilizers such as MicroLife 6-2-4 to synthetic fertilizers such as ammonium sulfate (with an NPK ratio of 21-0-0).

There are lots of varying (and sometimes conflicting) guidelines on when to fertilize. I follow the recommendation of Monte Nesbitt, Extension Horticulturist at Texas A&M, who advises to fertilize citrus trees three times a year, with 60% of the total fertilizer being applied on Valentine's Day, 20% applied on Mother's Day, and the final 20% applied on Father's Day. I like this because it's easy to remember and has been proven to work in our Texas Upper Gulf Coast growing area.

In regard to the "How much should I use?" question, it is a bit more involved than can be answered in this column. For exact recommendations, please send an e-mail to GALV3@wt.net to request a copy of our publication on fertilizing citrus. I advise delaying fertilization of newly transplanted citrus trees until they show signs of growth, usually three-to-six weeks after they are set in the spring. I also advise not applying any nitrogen fertilizer after June since doing so can decrease cold hardiness and delay fruit from ripening.

Q: You offered heirloom tomatoes at your plant sale a few weeks ago.

What is an heirloom tomato?

A: As it turns out, there is no universally accepted definition of heirloom seeds or vegetables, but there are several important guidelines that will help you get started growing your own.

An heirloom tomato is an open-pollinated variety or strain that is not used in large-scale modern agriculture. The variety or strain must be of a certain age to qualify as an heirloom.

Some say the variety or strain needs to have been grown prior to 1951, which is when hybrid varieties were developed, while others insist that the varieties or strains need to have originated before 1920.

Because heirloom varieties have not been genetically modified or crossed into other strains, there are no specific features that they share except that they have usually become well-adapted to their local growing area's conditions over the years.

While, heirloom varieties are usually prized for their flavor, they often feature fruit that has a unique color (red, orange, gold, green, purple, striped or white) or shape.

The seeds from heirloom plants have been passed from generation-to-generation and often have a local or even familial significance. I regret that I did not keep seeds from the heirloom tomatoes that my grandfather grew.

Several smaller seed companies

have found a niche in the market by exclusively selling heirloom seeds and even large commercial seed companies are following suit.

As a group, heirloom tomatoes tend to produce less fruit in our growing area. They will likely be more disease prone than hybrid varieties and take longer to produce fruit. Even so, I recommend trying one or two plants for their flavorful fruits.

Q: What's the difference between a determinant and an indeterminate tomato variety?

A: Tomatoes also come in two basic growth habits. Determinant or bush types stay short in contrast to indeterminate or vining types of tomatoes that grow tall.

Determinate types are a little easier to grow, as the plants do not have to be trained to stakes, as we generally do the indeterminate types. They produce their fruit over a shorter, more concentrated period. Indeterminate tomato plants grow larger and require more management, but they have the potential to produce more fruit over a longer period.

To confuse matters more, there are semi-determinant varieties. Celebrity is a commonly grown semi-determinant tomato variety in this area. It has excellent resistance to many diseases and dependably provides a heavy yield in the home garden.

