

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

Locally grown peaches started flowering and setting fruit in late January and February, and are at risk for cold weather damage. As long as temperatures remain above 32 degrees F, young peaches on a tree should be not be damaged.

Q: Hey Doc, when should I plant my tomatoes to be sure they do not freeze from the cold weather?

A: If you want a sure date, I would recommend July 4 as the spring season seems reluctant to arrive. I plan on planting my tomatoes this weekend. I will remain ready to provide some cold protection over the next several weeks.

Q: Will the cold weather conditions pose a threat to the young peaches on my peach trees?

A: The short answer is that temperatures will not likely drop down low enough to be of concern with cold weather injury to young peaches in the Galveston County area. I provided a short answer though the matter is way more complex than just stating a flat range of temperatures. As long as temperatures remain above 32 degrees F, the young peaches on a tree should be not be damaged.

Temperatures would have to drop into the upper 20s to cause damage to young peach fruit. The duration of below-freezing temperatures would also be an influencing factor. Since temperatures did not drop to the freezing point in most areas of Galveston County area, your peaches should be fine. I did not protect my peaches at my home nor those in the Horticulture Demonstration in Car-bide.



March 11, 2015



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

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, 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 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 vine types 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 tomato variety in this area. It has excellent resistance to many diseases and dependably pro-

vides a heavy yield in the home garden.

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

A: Broccoli is a cool season vegetable that dependably produces in local gardens. However, we have had some unusually warm days and unusually cool days over the past few weeks and the warm days stimulated broccoli plants to set 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!

