

Homegrown Vegetables, Herbs and More at Spring Plant Sale

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



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PHOTO CREDIT: Alice Rodgers

Master Gardeners Susan Roth, Ann Anderson and Phyllis Koenig (pictured above, left to right) will be among 120+ Master Gardeners who will be assisting area gardeners at the Spring Plant Sale and Seminar to be held on Saturday, February 17, in the Rodeo Arena at the Galveston County Fairgrounds along Hwy. 6 in Hitchcock.

It's the middle of February and the Master Gardener Annual Spring Plant Seminar and Sale is nearing. This year's seminar and sale will be conducted on Saturday, February 17, in the Rodeo Arena at the Galveston County Fairgrounds along Hwy. 6 in Hitchcock.

A pre-sale seminar will be

conducted at 8:00 a.m. before the sale yard opens to discuss the plants and plant varieties that will be offered. The sale yard will be opened from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. There will be an impressive range of vegetable transplants for the spring garden including tomatoes, peppers, egg-

plants, lettuce, squash, and more. Several types of herbs will also be available at the sale.

Now is the time to prepare for a successful home vegetable season. Experienced gardeners try to get plants in the ground as quickly as possible after the last expected frost. Experienced

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gardeners also know that as summer approaches, some heat sensitive plants (such as tomatoes) will stop blooming and/or setting blossoms as daytime temperatures rise above the 90 degree mark. Yes, it hard to imagine such temperatures now but our spring growing season will soon commence. An important key to successful spring gardening is getting maximum production before the summer heat sets in.

"When should I start my spring garden?" "Which varieties of vegetables should I plant?" These are two of the most commonly asked questions by home vegetable gardeners as the spring gardening season nears.

The answer to the first question is straightforward—it depends primarily on the specific vegetable in question and the area of the county where you garden. I posed the first question to Galveston County Master Gardener Ira Gervais who I consider to be a tomato whisperer (he is growing about 250 tomato seedlings for sharing with his tomato-growing friends and I count myself as one of them!). Ira's answer was "I'll be planting tomatoes in my home garden the week after the plant sale."

Ira lives in the northwest portion of Friendswood and noted that gardeners on Galveston Island can get an earlier start with tomatoes.

The answer to the second question above (which varieties of vegetables should I plant?) is not as simple—it depends on several factors.

Variety selection sometimes depends upon the intended use of the crop. For example, some of the newly released tomato varieties that produce a crop in a relatively short period of time are ideal for canning purposes. Varieties of tomatoes that mature over an extended period of time are better suited for the dinner table. Small-fruited tomatoes are best used in salads, while the larger ones are better for slicing.

The home gardener can best answer the question of which vegetable varieties to plant. The best approach is to start with varieties that are recommended for Galveston County based on several years of proven performance. However, no single variety, new or old, will be totally suitable for every home garden given different growing conditions and personal preferences of gardeners.

Give new, unproven varieties a chance if space is not limiting, but remember that they may perform well in one year but be quite disappointing in others. That's why you should plant most of your garden with tried and recommended varieties that have proven to be reliable over several years under different growing conditions.

Numerous vegetable varieties are released every year and many offer improvements such as increased yields, disease resistance, and uniformity. A total of 24 varieties of tomato transplants will be offered at the plant sale with vari-

ety names ranging from Juliet to Sweet Chelsea (my favorite cherry tomato) in addition to Tycoon and Fourth of July (which was rated as the best producer in our tomato trials conducted last year in the Discovery Garden).

A diverse selection of other plants will also be offered including 22 varieties of peppers ranging from sweet bell peppers (such as 'California Wonder') to peppers on the hottest end of the heat scale (including 'Trinidad Moruga Scorpion').

Ten-inch hanging baskets of bougainvillea in full bloom will be available with some baskets containing three plants with each plant producing a different color as well as baskets with a single flower color. A wide variety of plumerias and geraniums will be also be available.

An army of more than 120 Master Gardener volunteers in red vests and aprons will be on hand to answer questions and assist customers. Proceeds from the sale are utilized to support operation of the Master Gardener Discovery Garden in Carbide Park and to sponsor educational programs for home gardeners.

Visit our website (<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/>) for more information on the types and varieties of vegetables, herbs and other plants that will be offered at the sale and for directions to the sale location.

