

News From Your County Agent
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Happy spring break to those luck folks that are granted one. At least most of you can use spring break to practice getting used to the new time which began this weekend. It takes a little getting used to but by the time you feel good about the new time change it will be time to change it back in a few months. Greetings to all of you and thank you so much for reading this week.

Time To Consider Steer Projects for 2019 Shows

4-H Families are reminded that steer Validation is in 3 months. If you have youngsters that plan to raise a steer for the 2019 Zavala County Junior Show or a major show in Texas you might want to consider locating a steer project now. Remember Zavala County Steers show by weight only (No breed division), they must weigh at least 1000 lbs. by the Show in January and no more than 1450 lbs. There is no tooth rule in the county show which means that animals are not required to have their baby teeth by the show. Exhibitors are encouraged to find a steer that was born in late July, August or September of 2017 to make the weight limits for most shows.

Steer validation will take place in June and steer tag orders for the 2019 show season will begin next month in April If you need more information about raising a beef project, locating a show calf or other questions related to 4-H beef project contact me at the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

Want Something To Do In Spring Break? Enter The District 12 4-H Photography Contest

District 12 will be hosting its annual 4-H Photography Contest for 4-H'ers in District 12. The contest will be open to all three age divisions (Junior, Intermediate, and Senior) and the theme will be "*Backyard*". The contest will be done on-line including submission of photos and judging. The 2018 District 12 4-H Photography Contest Rules are attached and currently available on the District 12 4-H website at <http://d124-h.tamu.edu>. Each county is allowed 1 photo entry per category in each of the three age divisions for a total of 45 eligible photos.

Each 4-H'er entering photos for the District 4-H Photography Contest must register online through 4-H Connect. The registration fee will be \$8.00 per photo entry. Online registration now open and will end March 21, 2018. Payment must be made on 4-H connect at the time of registration. Payments made by 4-H check must be postmarked within three business days of registration submission. No late entries will be accepted. No refunds will be given. For more information about this contest contact me at the Zavala County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883

Tip of the Week: Successful Tomato Gardening

Yes tomato gardening is one of the most common plants in home gardens next to peppers and squash. They are a good source of vitamin A and fair source of vitamin C. Fresh tomatoes are popular in salads, on sandwiches and sliced. They can be cooked and used in many ways. Texas gardeners can grow a variety of small- and large-fruited tomatoes: Smallfruit include Presto, Cherry

Grande, Saladette and Small Fry. Largefruit tomatoes include Better Boy, Big Beef, Big Box, Bush Beefsteak, Carnival, Celebrity and Homestead. There are many others on the market but these have been proven to do well in our area. Released in 2011 the Tycoon tomato has many characteristics that rival or even best the Celebrity tomato, the long-standing favorite of many commercial and home growers, according to our Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service horticulturist.

Tycoon tomato has superior resistance to diseases and nematodes, and it can produce very large fruit of superior quality. For example, Tycoon is resistant to tomato yellow leaf curl virus, a disease that has become a major problem for many varieties in the past few years, Rodriguez said. It is also resistant to the fungi verticillium and fusarium, races one and two, and tomato spotted wilt virus, as well as nematodes. If you want large sized fruit tomatoes I encourage you to try the Tycoon variety this year.

For the most part all tomato varieties Tomatoes grow well in most Texas areas if planted in soil that drains well. They need at least 6 hours of sunlight each day. Work the garden soil only when it is dry enough not to stick to the garden tools. Several weeks before planting, work the top 8 to 10 inches of soil. Remove all rocks and trash from the soil and rake it to break up large clods. Tomatoes grow best in soils that have lots of organic matter. If possible, spread 2 to 3 inches of organic material such as compost, leaves, or rotted hay over the planting area. Mix this organic material into the top 4 to 6 inches of soil.

Most families need only a few plants, so it is best to buy plants and not grow them from seed. Buy healthy, green plants that are 6 to 8 inches tall. You can set out tomato plants now since all danger of frost has passed. To get a quick start plant tomato Transplants instead of trying to grow them from seeds. If possible, set out tomatoes on raised beds of soil that are about 6 inches high. Make the transplant holes 3 to 4 inches deep and 2 to 4 feet apart in the row. For staked or caged plants, space the rows at least 3 feet apart. For unsupported plants, leave 4 to 5 feet between the rows. Transplant your tomatoes in the evening or on a cloudy day to keep them from drying too much and wilting. Before placing transplants into the soil, fill the transplant holes with water and let it soak in. After planting water the tomato plants slowly and deeply to help them develop a strong root system. Do not let the tomatoes wilt severely, or yields and fruit quality will be low.

During the growing season and for the highest yields, place mulch around the tomato plants. Spread a 2- to 3-inch layer of organic material such as compost, leaves, or hay around the growing plants. Mulching will help stop weed growth and water loss from the soil. You can let tomatoes grow on the ground or support them with stakes or cages. When you stake tomatoes, put the stake in shortly after transplanting to lessen root damage. For staked or caged plants, space the rows at least 3 feet apart. For unsupported plants, leave 4 to 5 feet between the rows. Fertilize the plants every 3 to 4 weeks with 1 to 2 level tablespoons of fertilizer scattered around each plant. To control weeds, you may cultivate or hoe around the plants. Work the soil only deep enough to kill the weeds but shallow enough not to damage the tomato plant roots. Many insecticides are available at garden centers for homeowner use. Sevin is a synthetic insecticide; organic options include sulfur and Bt-based insecticides. Sulfur also has fungicidal properties and helps in controlling many diseases. Neem oil, sulfur, and other fungicides are available for use.

Now enjoy the fruits of your labor. For best quality, pick tomatoes at full color. If you pick them when they are pink, let them ripen at room temperature for maximum rip vine flavor. They may be stored in the refrigerator **after** they reach full color. Enjoy your garden and have a fruitful week.
M.V.

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