

SPRING TASKS IN THE GARDEN

By Virginia Carlson

This is a great time to plant veggies in the garden. Many of our leafy veggies grow well in cool weather, lettuces, mesclun, cilantro, cabbage, Swiss chard, kale, and spinach. Lettuces started at three week intervals will give you lettuce until really hot weather sets in. They don't need full sun to do well. Then there are the other good greenies, broccoli, peas, grow your own pea pod peas, kohlrabi and Brussels sprouts. I train my pea pods on tomato rings to keep them up in the air and have fewer mildew problems. Many of these veggies can be grown in containers, but remember that most will need about one gallon of soil per plant so use large containers. Rutabagas, beets, carrots, onion sets and garlic can be planted now. They appreciate more sun. Parsley is a biennial and should be planted each spring. The flat-leafed Italian is more flavorful than the curled leaf type. Sage is a perennial, as are the mints and thymes. The spring plant sales at the college will have many types of herbs.

Tomato sales have begun, at the Fullerton College this weekend, at Fullerton Arboretum in two weeks. Peppers will need full sun and like some warmth, Basil likes warmer temps also.

Soil for veggies should be well prepared with plenty of humus added. I use Gro Power for fertilizing almost everything, it is organic and builds up the soil more than the chemical fertilizers.

When choosing tomato plants, remember that the heirlooms have great flavor but may not be resistant to disease and nematodes. They are usually indeterminate which means that the vines keep on growing and producing fruits. On the labels of hybrids there may be an 'I' for indeterminate growers, or a 'D' for the determinate ones which means that they have a more restrained habit of growth and tend to have a large crop of fruit at one time. There will also be some letters such as A for resistance to Alternaria wilt, F, for resistance to Fusarium, T for resistance to Tobacco Mosaic virus V for resistance to Verticillium wilt, and 'N' for resistance to nematodes. Heirloom varieties haven't been tested for these.

You have probably been seeing pansies and Iceland poppies and snapdragons in bloom. It isn't too late to plant them nor stock, snapdragons, primroses, ranunculus and anemones. Many perennials can be divided now, daylilies, achillea or yarrow etc.

This is garden cleanup time, but also a good time to mulch. Mulches are very important to retain moisture, to keep the foliage drier, to add humus to the soil gradually. Leaves help prevent erosion on slopes. Ground or shredded bark, straw, compost all work well. Manures often have weed seeds, also they may have enough nitrogen to burn if put close to stems.

Native plants planted now should be watered about once a month the first season but usually do quite well without after that. My manzanita has been blooming but ceanothus will come later.

WHY DID MY PLANTS DIE?

I walked too close; I dropped some sod on it.

I planted it wrong way up, and grew it in a yogurt cup

I forgot to make a hole; the soggy compost took its toll.

I watered it with herbicide: I scattered bone meal far and wide;

I left it baking in the sun while I departed for some fun. Anon.

TOMATO SALES AND INFORMATION

The Seventh Annual Tomato sale will be at the Fullerton College Horticultural Dept, off Berkeley east of Lemon, from 10 – 3:00 on March 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 12:00 to 3:00 on Sunday, the 5th. The Spring Plant sale is May 6 and 7th, May 12th and 13th.

Fullerton Arboretum will have its Giant Tomato Sale the next weekend at the Arboretum south of Yorba Linda Boulevard at Associated Road..

When looking at the flyers for the tomato sales, we notice that there may be over 100 varieties at both sites. At Fullerton College, they are divided into seven main groups,

The Beefsteak types which get quite large and come in many sizes and colors. Aunt Ruby's German Green may weigh a pound or less, as is f Black Brandywine. Burpee's Supersteak may weigh 1-2 lbs, while Giant Belgium, a dark pink sweet one may get up to 5 lbs. Most of these take 65-95 days to mature. An old heirloom, Mortgage Lifter is a deep pink, sweet, mild tomato which can be 3 lbs.

Slicers are generally smaller, First lady is 4-5 oz. while Lemon Boy, Momotaro, and Odoriko will weigh about 8 oz. Sweet Tangerine is bright orange, crops heavily and stays small, about 6 oz. The vine is Determinate in growth.

Grape tomatoes are usually brilliant red, one called 'Grape' will be an inch and a half at maturity while Sprite is bite sized and Juliet can get up to an oz. Cherry tomatoes are often rounder than grape, Black Plum will get up to 3 inches, Snow White is pale yellow while Sweetie is a very sweet 1/2inch size. They often mature in about 65 days.

Saladette size seems to be a little larger, Arkansas Traveller is 5-7 oz. in about 85 days, others ripen earlier.

Good Container tomatoes are usually "Determinate" in growth, which means that they will grow to a certain size, produce much of their fruit at one time, and taper off. Bush Early Girl will have fruits up to 7 oz, while Lucky Leprechaun has ping pong ball size fruits.

Those for sauce or paste or canning are more solid than others, Ace, Amish paste, San Marzona are examples, Italian Gold Roma will give a gold tomato sauce. An heirloom one called Sausage has fruits 6 inches long.

In addition to size, the flyers will usually tell you if they are hybrids or heirloom varieties. Heirlooms have been passed down through families. They may be irregular in shape and size but have great taste, thin skin and other desirable characteristics. They are usually "Indeterminate" meaning that the vines keep on growing and producing fruit. Some of them are from colder climates and have shorter growing seasons than others. The number of days from planting out to first fruit may vary from 52 for Siletz, a deep red hybrid slicer to Dixie Golden Giant which takes 85- 100 days.

Hybrids are more disease resistant. Shady Lady is resistant to A -Alternaria,- early blight, V- Verticillium Wilt, F - Fusarium Wilt, and T- Tobacco Mosaic Virus. Disease resistance is not listed for heirlooms varieties. If nematodes are a problem in your soil, select a hybrid which has an "N" listed on the flyer. Beefmaster(VFN) is resistant to Verticillium, Fusarium and nematodes. Heirlooms generally don't have this information.

When planting tomatoes, they can be planted deeper than they are in the pot, and those with long stems can be laid down sidewise with foliage out, they will form roots all along the stem in contact with soil. They should have enriched soil with good drainage and kept rather moist but not overly wet. Mulches are a good idea. I seldom see the large caterpillars than I did in past times when Hunts were processing lots of tomato paste and catsup in west Fullerton. Those metamorphosed into the hummingbird-size sphinx moths seen at dusk. Tomatoes need some calcium in the soil to prevent blossom-end rot. A tomato fertilizer should have a balanced formula such as 8-8-8 or 6-10-4. I use an organic fertilizer on everything, GroPower+. Other good organic fertilizers are made by Dr. Earth, Whitney etc. Fish emulsion is another good organic fertilizer, organics usually have the needed trace minerals for good growth and fruiting.