

## Homegrown Vegetables and Herbs to be Offered at Spring Plant Sale

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTOS BY **William M. Johnson**



**February 11, 2016**

Over the past several weeks, Master Gardeners have been growing several types of vegetable and herb transplants in their greenhouse. The transplants will be sold at the Master Gardeners' annual Spring Plant Sale on Saturday, Feb. 20, at the Galveston County Fairgrounds in Hitchcock.



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

It's almost 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 20, in the Rodeo Arena at the Galveston County Fairgrounds along Hwy. 6 in Hitchcock. This is a new location for the sale as we have outgrown the space at our old location near the County Extension Office in Carbine Park.

A pre-sale seminar will be conducted on February 20 at

8:00 a.m. to discuss the plants and plant varieties that will be offered in the sale yard. 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, eggplants, lettuce, squash, zucchini, artichoke and more. Several types of herbs will also be available at the sale. Master Gardeners have been growing herbs and tomatoes in

their greenhouse at the Demonstration Garden. Other vegetables are being grown by contract with an area greenhouse grower.

A hint of gardening fever is already in the air as experienced gardeners know that in just a few days the spring gardening season will be underway.

Now is the time to make preparations for a successful home vegetable gardening season. Experienced gardeners try to get



plants in the ground as quickly as possible after the last expected frost. Experienced gardeners also know that as summer approaches, some heat sensitive plants (such as tomatoes) will stop blooming and/or setting blossoms at temperatures above 90 degrees. 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 I 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 fairly 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 presented a seminar last Saturday titled "Growing Great Tomatoes." His answer was "We will be planting tomatoes in the Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park on Thursday [tomorrow]."

Gardeners located on Galveston Island can get an earlier start with tomatoes than gardeners in the mid-county area due to milder air temperatures. Ira did add that he's planting tomatoes in his home garden next week since he resides in Friendswood, the northwest area of the county.

The answer to the second question above (which varieties of vegeta-

bles 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.

Numerous vegetable varieties are released every year and many offer improvements such as increased yields, disease resistance, and uniformity. Seed catalogs offer hundreds of selections, each with an appealing description and attractive photograph to make decisions even more difficult. Quite often the new varieties are highly desirable, but sometimes the old standards prove to be more reliable--and even better--in their performance over many growing seasons.

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.

Both old and new varieties should be tried and compared for yield and performance. Give new, un-

proven 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 recommended varieties that have proven to be reliable under different growing conditions over several years.

The high temperatures of summer will be advancing upon us in a few weeks. Each vegetable performs best if planted within recommended planting dates which are based on results from years of field trials. The earlier you can get your vegetables started within these recommended dates, the better.

Getting tomato transplants in the ground early may necessitate providing some cold protection should a cool front occur but the heavier and earlier yields are well-worth the effort that may be needed.

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

