



PHOTO BY Herman Auer

Many gardeners grow heirloom tomatoes because of their superior flavor and texture. Terry Cuclis (pictured above) grows and evaluates more than 25 varieties of heirloom tomatoes in his vegetable garden in Alvin.

The winter season has been rather cold and damp thus far. Most residents were likely excited to see the sun briefly appear during the weekend after days of cloudy weather. With a little luck, Mother Nature will send a few blossoms to home landscapes later during the month. In the meantime, look over the following checklist for February's gardening activities:

Raised Beds. Consider building a raised bed for the vegetable garden if the

existing garden site has poor soil drainage. Rainy weather can make such raised beds well worth the effort when it's time to plant in spring.

Vegetables. Transplants of broccoli and cabbage should be set out before February 15. Beets, carrots, collards, Swiss chard, lettuce, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, English peas, radish, spinach and turnips can be planted throughout the month of February.

Lawns. Yes, most area St.

Augustine and Bermuda grass lawns are dull brown in color because of our on-and-off periods of rather chilly weather. However, do not fertilize lawns now in the hope of making it green up faster. Lawns should not be fertilized this time of year until after the grass starts to actively grow; otherwise, if you fertilize now you will be benefiting winter weeds and some of the nitrogen will be lost before lawn growth starts.



February 12, 2014



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

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

Stone Fruits. Fertilize stone fruit trees by late February. The general recommendation for fertilizer for bearing stone fruit trees is to apply two cups of a balanced fertilizer per inch of trunk in February. A second application is recommended in during mid-May. A fertilizer such as 15-5-10 (commonly used for lawns) is suitable for use on fruit trees and also for shrubs and landscape trees. Spread fertilizer evenly under the drip line but keep six inches away from the trunk.

New Trees and Shrubs. When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially when dealing with bare-root plants. The medium to small size trees (4-to-6 feet) are usually faster to become established and more effective in the landscape than the large sizes. Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly the first year.

All about Heirloom Tomatoes

Master Gardener Terry Cuclis will provide a PowerPoint presentation entitled "All about Heirloom Tomatoes" from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 22, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbine Park (4102-B Main Street) in La Marque.

Terry will discuss his growing experiences with more than 25 varieties of heirloom tomatoes in his vegetable garden in Alvin. No fee but pre-registration requested (phone: 281-534-3413, ext. 1-2; e-mail: GALV3@wt.net; website: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/>).

Many gardeners grow heirloom

tomatoes because of their superior flavor. Heirloom varieties that have been selected for taste and tenderness through several generations are often tastier than commercial hybrid cultivars that have been selected for ease of shipping, uniform appearance or ability to grow well throughout the country.

Most folks know that a store-bought tomato just doesn't taste as good as one you pick from your garden. That's why tomatoes are the most widely grown vegetable in home gardens. But new or improved varieties don't always impress the tomato connoisseur.

The term "heirloom tomato" is used to describe the old-fashioned varieties many gardeners believe have the best flavor. Heirloom tomato cultivars are old, non-hybrid cultivars. They often feature fruit that has a unique color (red, pink, orange, yellow, chocolate, gold, green, purple, striped, white, etc.), shape or flavor.

Some heirloom tomatoes date back to the 1800s. Many come from Europe. Nearly all are indeterminate types that will keep growing and producing all season and require extensive trellising.

You may know somebody who is growing heirloom tomatoes from seeds that have been passed down through the generations. These vegetables have more value than the fruit that they bear. They are also a bit of our history.

I recall my teenage years when my grandfather planted several heirloom tomatoes in his garden. My siblings and I eagerly awaited harvest time each spring to taste Grandpa's pink-colored and orange-colored heirloom to-

matoes. If you know of folks who grow heirloom tomatoes, try to learn the history behind growing them. It can become a part of a family's heritage that should be preserved and passed on to the next generation.

Some common heirloom varieties include "Brandywine", "German Giant", "Cherokee Purple", "Big Zebra", "Old German", "Black Krim", among others. One of my favorite heirloom tomato varieties is known as "German Johnson." I cannot claim any family credit or history to the cultivar name—"German Johnson" is just my favorite heirloom tomato as it is a really delicious, juicy and meaty tomato. Make your reservation to attend Terry's presentation on February 22 to get started with growing your own heirloom tomato.