**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**Rodeo Tomato**

It is Rodeo time and true to the tradition Jerry Parsons, The Texas AgriLife Extension, Gardening Volunteers of South Texas, and Bexar County Master Gardeners have introduced a new tomato to the market. Extension horticultural Larry Stein and Horticulture agent David Rodriguez work with Parsons and the volunteers at the Verstuyft farm to pick the best performing tomato out of the large number selected. That tomato is introduced at the Rodeo where they can be purchased for $3 per 4 inch pot or 4 for $10. For those of you who don’t visit the Rodeo, the tomato transplants will be available at area nurseries.

This year’s introduction BHN 6O2 is described as a plant that produces globe-shaped 12 ounce fruit. The plants are determinate so should be manageable in the garden or in a container.

Look for the Rodeo tomato in the new “Buckaroos on the Ranch: A Truly Texas Experience Pavilion” at the Bexar County Master Gardener booth.

In 2010 the Rodeo Tomato was Tycoon. The new introduction is going to have to perform very well to match the Tycoon. It produced large fruit on a relatively small plant. The Tycoon plants were very productive even in the extreme conditions of 2011. It won the top tomato prize at local competitions for uniform, well colored, firm fruit. One of the most important characteristics of Tycoon was that it was Yellow Tomato Wilt resistant. The white-fly-spread disease wiped out many plantings in 2010 but did not touch the Tycoon in 2011.

Tycoon is available on the market for 2012. Include a few in your garden as insurance against the Yellow Tomato Wilt and so you can compare it to BHN 602 and other varieties.

In 2012 you should be able to find limited numbers of Heatwave, Merced, Surefire, and Dwarf Cherry Surprise along with generous supplies of 444, Solar Fire, Sun Pride, and Celebrity.

Be conservative in your tomato culture, temperatures have been mild but the soil is still cool. Tomatoes planted in cold soil harden off and fruit production is delayed.

Potting-up is a widespread San Antonio practice to use for tomato transplants purchased early when selection is best but it is too cold to plant directly into the garden. Put individual transplants in one gallon black plastic pots filled with potting mix and enriched with Osmocote.

The containers can be kept in the greenhouse or put in a sunny spot out of the wind. If the temperature is forecast to fall to 40ºF or below, move the outside tomatoes inside until the temperatures warm up again. Treated in this manner the transplants will grow at a fast rate and be ready to transplant into the garden after April 1 when soil and air temperatures are high enough to support bloom and fruit set.

I have always liked tomato cages made out of 6 x 6 inch square, 4 feet tall wire concrete reinforcing mesh. They are hard to find and difficult to make on your own. There is a new cage on the market that may be as sturdy but is much easier to use. They are square folding tomato cages. Look for them at area nurseries.

If you want to build your own mesh cages buy a roll of 4 foot concrete reinforcing mesh. Cut off 6 feet long pieces and roll them into cylinders. They will have a diameter of approximately 2 feet. To make it more convenient to secure them to the ground, cut out the connecting piece on each square so that 6 inch wire stakes remain. The same thing can be done on 4 to 5 squares at one of the sides where the cylinder sides are joined. Instead of sticking into the ground, the wire spikes can be bent to overlap the square on the adjoining wire to secure the cylinder.

To build the mesh tomato cages you will need gloves and relatively large wire cutters.

It is not necessarily related to tomatoes, but San Antonio Water System and Gardening Volunteers of South Texas are offering a Landscape Water Saver Design school on Saturday, February 25 at Parkhills Baptist Church located at 17747 San Pedro from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Bring the plans for your landscape along to be reviewed. There is a $25 charge ($40 for a family.) Brian Hough and Jerry Parsons will be speakers. Call 251-8101 or visit [www.gardeningvolunteers.org](http://www.gardeningvolunteers.org) on or before February 20 to reserve a seat.