**2016 Rodeo Tomato and Potting-Up**

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 It is a long time tradition that area gardeners appreciate. Every year Jerry Parsons, David Rodriguez and their Texas A&M AgriLife team identify a “Rodeo Tomato” to introduce to the San Antonio area gardeners in February. The tomato variety is selected through a field testing program to identify which of the new and existing hybrid tomatoes perform best in Central Texas conditions. Attendees at the San Antonio Rodeo and Stock Show receive the first opportunity to purchase the new variety. The Bexar County Master Gardeners and Gardening Volunteers of South Texas sell transplants at the Rodeo as part of their volunteer scholarship programs. Most years the selected variety is also sold by area neighborhood nurseries after the Rodeo.

In past years Tycoon, Solar Fire, Tigress, Bobcat, BHN 444, BHN 968, Heat Wave, Surefire and other great performers have been introduced in San Antonio as the “Rodeo Tomato.” This year the “Red Deuce” is the new “Rodeo Tomato.”

**‘Red Deuce’** tomato is a determinate selection that produces big yields of large to extra-large 10 oz. globe shaped fruit that have great eye-appeal and good eating quality. ‘Red Deuce’ has resistance to Verticillium Wilt, Fusarium Wilt (races 1, 2), Tobacco Mosaic Virus and Stemphylium.

**Characteristics**

* Fruit is globe-shaped, uniform ripening, and ripens to a deep red color
* The plant is especially short in stature but provides superior foliage protection to the crop
* High yields of large to extra-large fruit that hold up well
* Performs well in early and mid-season plantings

As much fun as it is to visit the Rodeo in February and pick up the new “Red Deuce selection, it is too early to plant tomatoes in the garden. It is best to “pot-up” the plants until the soil and air temperatures warm enough to support active growth, usually after mid-March.

To “*pot up*” your transplants, fill a one-to-three gallon black plastic nursery container with a premium potting mix. Enrich the potting mix with generous amounts of a slow release fertilizer made especially for containers, such as an 18-6-12 Osmocote. If an organic fertilizer formulation is preferred, consider a 4-2-3 or similar analysis at twice the rate. Tomatoes are heavy feeders, in addition to the Osmocote you may want to add soluble fertilizer in the watering can every week.

The goal of the “*potting up”* activity is to maintain the fast growth rate established at the nursery. Place the potted up tomato in a full sun location out of the wind. The wind can injure foliage and reduce overall plant growth. A greenhouse is ideal, but many locations on the patio or the south side of the house also work well.

It is important to keep the tomatoes adequately watered but not over-watered. Check the mix moisture by digging around in the pot with your fingers—if you feel moisture—do not water. Too much watering of young plants can cause roots to rot.

 If the plant is subjected to more than a few hours of sub 40° F temperature it will stop growing and you will see purplish coloring on the leaves.

To keep the tomato transplant actively growing, move it to shelter when temperatures below 40° F are forecast. That will mean moving the containers into the house on cold evenings.

Find the “Red Deuce” tomato transplants and other horticultural activities at the HEB Little Buckaroo Building at the Rodeo. If you make your visit between noon and 2pm on Sunday, February 14, you will also find Jerry, Milton and me doing the Milberger’s Gardening South Texas radio show in the same building. We will see you then.