

## What is Blooming Now

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Prepare the soil for new plantings in the vegetable garden by incorporating 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 for every 100 sq. ft of bed.

It is your last chance to plant tomatoes with some expectation that you will produce and ripen a crop before the hot weather shuts down production. To improve the odds, make sure you obtain one of the transplants offered in 1-gallon containers. Look for HM 8849, Tycoon, or HM1823 as fast producers of large tomatoes. BHN 968 is an excellent cherry tomato that is a fast and steady producer. It is nematode resistant, as are Tycoon, Celebrity, and Valley Girl. The determinate HM8849 and BHN 968 are especially desirable as container plants. Use a 15 gallon or larger container.

In addition to the fertilizer as part of the bed preparation, side dress the tomatoes with slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 every 3 weeks. Use malathion to control stink bugs if they appear. Bt works for hornworms and other caterpillars and use Daconil to stop the progress of fungal disease. If spider mites are an issue in your garden, try a preventative spray of 2 tablespoons of seaweed extract mixed in 1 gallon of water. Spray every week under the leaves. Tomato cages are important for support of the tomato vines. For something different seek out the brightly colored cages now offered on the market.

It is time to plant peppers. Your favorite nursery has a good selection of hot and mild peppers. Rio Grande Gold is a crisp mild pepper that is available in small numbers. The banana peppers are also a tasty variety to grow for fresh eating and salads and are faster to produce fruit than the bell peppers. For a hot pepper, TAM Mild Jalapeno, is my favorite, but probably is not hot enough for real hot pepper aficionados.

Plant peppers about 3 feet apart in the garden. They do best in full sun. I use small tomato cages to support the fruit but they are not as necessary as for tomatoes. Peppers do very well when grown in containers. The plants are attractive, and the fruit is decorative. Fertilize peppers in containers with Osmocote. Peppers perform better in heat than tomatoes, they will keep producing into the fall.

In terms of heat tolerance, eggplant is in the same league as peppers. Grow them to the same specifications as peppers. There is some choice as to varieties of eggplant. Black Beauty is the favorite and is easy to grow.

Okra transplants are available at area nurseries but planting them by seed is the usual way to grow them. The most common okra, Clemson Spineless and most other varieties grow very tall. Many area Master Gardeners and Gardening Volunteers use the seed of Oscar okra, it is productive, tasty and only grows to about 6 feet tall. Your favorite nursery may also offer it.

Plant okra in full sun with about 2 feet between plants. Once the okra is being produced, harvest every other day. The pods get large and tough quickly. Remove over-mature pods to make room for new pods.

Fire ants find okra a handy place to feed. They harvest the aphids on the plants but also will eat the bloom buds. Control fire ants in the vegetable garden with an insecticide labeled for such use with an active ingredient of Spinosad.

