

## Rodeo Tomatoes and the Winter Vegetables

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In my experience the first of February is the last planting opportunity for winter vegetables with a reasonable expectation to harvest a crop. It is important that the soil of the planting area is prepared by adding 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow-release or winterizer lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. ft of bed. Use transplants for broccoli, cabbage, and onions. English peas, radishes, carrots, and lettuce can be planted by seed.

Potatoes can also be planted now. Obtain seed potatoes from a nursery or feed store and cut them in pieces so each piece has at least one eye and is approximately 2 inches square. Dig trenches at least one foot deep. Place the seed pieces in the bottom of the trench with 18 inches between seeds. Initially cover the seed potato pieces with 2 inches of soil and then add more soil as sprouts emerge from the soil. Eventually the trench will be filled with soil and the potato plants.

New potatoes can start to be harvested as soon as the plants bloom. Harvest the plants by digging them up one by one. The last potatoes should be harvested by the time when the plants are completely brown. Yield per plant in Central Texas is not large and they don't store for long periods, but the home-grown new potatoes are a great addition to a gardener's menu.

It is too early to plant tomatoes in the garden but there will be pressure to obtain some of the year's Rodeo Tomatoes. Every year Dr Jerry Parsons, David Rodriguez and their volunteer teams from the Bexar County Master Gardeners and Gardening Volunteers of South Texas identify a new tomato variety that out performed all the other varieties in field testing in the year previous. It is offered on the market as the "Rodeo Tomato" for the current year. The Rodeo Tomato is first made available in February at the San Antonio Rodeo where it is sold by the Master Gardeners as a fundraiser to support youth gardening.

In 2019 the selected tomato is "Harris Moran 8849". The claims for HM 8849 include that it is an extra-large fruit produced on a sturdy plant with good leaf cover. The fruit has a slightly flattened shape and boasts resistance to diseases such as verticillium, fusarium, and gray leaf spot.

HM 8849 is a determinate tomato which means it is well suited for Central Texas because the plant grows quickly to full size and then concentrates on setting and maturing fruit. There is little chance for the HM 8849 to be caught up without matured fruit when the hot summer weather arrives.

The best time to place transplants in the garden is when the soil and air temperatures warm-up, about April 1. If you obtain transplants before then, consider "potting them up". "Potting them up" means placing the transplant in a 1 gallon or larger container filled with potting soil and enriched with Osmocote until the garden soil warms up. Put the containers in full sun out of the wind until it is time to plant them in the garden. If temperatures below 40 degrees are forecast move the containers inside until the weather warms up.