

GARDENERS' DIRT

Victoria County Master Gardener Association

TOMATOES TAKE CENTER STAGE:

Bedding plant pop-up sale slated

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PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY VICTORIA COUNTY MASTER GARDENER LINDA LEES

These vegetables were grown in backyard containers andn illustrate, with the exception of the green beans, what will be available at the VCMGA pop-up sale.

Spring just isn't spring if I don't have at least two tomato plants growing in my backyard. I favor hybrids that are easy to grow, provide abundant crops and have great flavor. Hey, that really isn't asking for too much.

That's why I'm excited about the upcoming Victoria County Master Gardener Pop-up Bedding Plant Sale on March 11. The tomato, a favorite crop of countless gardeners, will be taking center stage.

VEG greenhouse to be location

The event will be from 8 a.m. until noon at the VCMGA greenhouse at Victoria Educational Gardens, 283 Bachelor Drive, across from the Victoria Regional Airport control tower.

A limited number of vegetable and herb plants will be up for grabs at reasonable prices, so don't wait until the last minute to arrive. Volunteers will on hand to help the shoppers make selections and answer questions about planting, growing and maintaining plants.

As much as I adore the smaller sized tomato, it is the beefsteak that looks to be the hardiest at the greenhouse. Another selection is the celebrity, which has worn the "Texas Super Star" designation since 2021. To achieve this honor the celebrity had to perform well for growers throughout the state, while being easy to propagate and widely available at a reasonable price.

A really big tomato

Given the choice if there is only one plant I can grow as far as food is concerned, it would be a tomato. Some gardeners are drawn to the beefsteak, not only because its tomatoes weigh on the average one pound but because it is perfect for hamburgers, sauces, dips and salads. This juicy tomato may not be pretty due to funny shapes and unsmooth surfaces, but it is ideal for the home garden.



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Juliet tomato closeup taken last summer just prior to fruit ripening. The crop was abundant.

A longtime favorite

The celebrity tomato is hard to beat. Texas gardeners have been gratified with the celebrity for at least four decades. No wonder it was named a “Super Star” by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and leaders in the horticulture field. It is resistant to root-knot nematode, wilt and the tobacco mosaic virus. Another plus is, while it is delicious, it is less likely than other tomatoes to crack when subjected to excessive water.

This tomato is a good one for the beginning gardener. The celebrity usually weighs around 8 ounces and has good flavor.

Small but mighty

The hybrid plum-shaped Juliet with its clusters of fruit just doesn't get the notice I think it should. It was the All-American Selection Winner in 1999. Often called the “mini Roma” it grows large enough if you are really careful lengthwise slicing for sandwiches and salads.

Its fruit may weigh only between 1 and 2 ounces but individual trusses may have six to eight tomatoes. That fact can add up to a lot of tomatoes. Like most small plum types it is known to keep on fruiting from June through October and sometimes later.

Two unique tomatoes also on sale will be the patio tomatoes, a favorite of generations of Texas gardeners, and the Zapotec Oaxacan Tomato, a true heirloom which dates back to the ancient Zapotec tribe in the Oaxacan area of Mexico. Numerous sources have noted this one is a good stuffing tomato.

More than tomatoes

Victoria Master Gardeners also have planted parsley, the California bell pepper, tomatillos, black beauty eggplant, butter dish summer squash, Fordhook zucchini squash, purple basil and jalapeno grande. Other plants have been started but as of this writing it isn't certain if they will be ready to sell. You'll never know what's waiting for you unless you come to the Pop-Up Sale.

The Gardeners' Dirt is written by members of the Victoria County Master Gardener Association, an educational outreach of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and printed in Victoria Advocate.