

Gardening with Chuck Programs for February 15 - 21, 2021

Tomato Week

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When it comes to vegetable gardening, tomatoes are the #1 favorite crop. Even people that don't have a garden are liable to put a plant or two in pots and grow them that way. Not surprisingly tomatoes are usually the #1 source of production questions during the summer. With that in mind, and the fact that with cold weather we need to think green, I hereby declare this week as tomato education week. I'm going to be tossing out a lot of names of tomatoes, which is no surprise because last time I saw a listing there were over 1500 tomato cultivars out there in the trade! We're going to talk about different cultivars for different purposes. But the one thing I always want gardeners to know is that if a particular cultivar is working for them the way they like it, don't feel you need to change anything because of me! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

What Type of Tomato

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. When it comes to tomatoes we can break them down into habit of growth: indeterminate, determinate and semi-determinate. Most heirloom tomatoes are indeterminate. They start growing and after while they start blooming and setting fruit but the plant just keeps on growing. These plants can get 6 or 8 feet tall or sprawl all over the place. They will keep producing until they die from frost or disease. Determinate cultivars grow to a certain size, stop putting on new growth, then produce a bunch of flowers and fruit all at once and then produce very little more after that. These are what commercial growers with mechanical harvesting equipment use. Semi-determinate are sort of a cross in between. They are more compact plant than indeterminate but once they start bearing they will bear all season long. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

High Yield Tomato Trials

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Serious tomato growers usually have one of two objectives. They want nice big slicing tomatoes or they want a lot of production for canning and salsa making. Many universities put out yield trials to measure production per plant in replicated trials. Certainly not every single variety that's available, but some of the more well known ones. In recent trials the top three yielding varieties, based on pounds of tomatoes per plant, were all open pollinated heirloom varieties specifically Anna Russian at 21 pounds per plant, Cherokee Purple at 17.6 pounds and German Johnson at 17.2 lbs. Other notables in the top ten were Beef Master at 16.7 lbs, Early Girl at 16.5 and Big Boy at 16.1. Two other popular varieties that were in the top ten were Jet Star at 15.3 pounds per plant and Celebrity at 15 lbs. I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Large Fruit Tomato Trials

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. Slicer tomatoes. Those nice big tomatoes that you can take one slice and cover your entire hamburger or half a plate. It's a big deal to some gardeners, others of us don't really care! But if you want a shot at some big slicer tomatoes, here are some varieties to consider. Number one in the trials I was looking at recently was Amana Orange with an average fruit size of 12 ounces. Yes, you'll see ads for tomatoes approaching 2 lbs and those are the exceptions. Having an average fruit size of 12 ounces is pretty exceptional. Right behind that was Beef Master at 11.6 ounces. Beef Master was also one of the top overall yielders. And a short list of others with average fruit size over 10 ounces is Brimmer Pink, Brandy Boy and German Pink. If you want to see the lists of both big fruit and heavy yields, give me a call! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.

Beware Online Fertilizer Sales

This is Gardening with Chuck. I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent. This may come as a shock to you, but that company or person online who says they have just the fertilizer for your garden or tomatoes or whatever don't have a clue what fertilizer your garden soil needs. In fact I don't either until we run a soil test on it. I recently saw an ad on a social media platform promoting a calcium magnesium fertilizer for your tomatoes and it led you to believe that it was the only thing you needed to grow great tomatoes. Our soils, at least most of the non-sandy soils around our area, are not deficient in calcium or magnesium. There is plenty of both which makes sense if you stop to think about what underlays much of our region. We can test for calcium and magnesium but it just isn't something we do regularly. Now, nitrogen and phosphorus are things we need regularly! Just sayin'! I'm Chuck Otte and this has been Gardening with Chuck.