

## 2021 Rodeo Tomato



**Ruby Crush** Grape Tomato

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Rodeo Tomato for 2021 – Ruby Crush

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Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service led by horticulturists David Rodriguez and Larry Stein Ph.D. and assisted by the Bexar Master Gardeners and Dr Jerry Parsons have again named a rodeo tomato. This year's winner is **Ruby Crush**, a determinate grape tomato. Now before you hang your head in disgust over a grape tomato being given this honor, let us familiarize you with this plant and its qualities.

This year the selection is the **Ruby Crush**. **Ruby Crush** is a widely adapted, mid-early maturing grape tomato, on mid-compact, determinate plants with good vigor and foliage cover. Setting and size is very good through the plant with final yield potential being quite high. Limited to no pruning is appropriate for this variety, with caging being ideal. **Ruby Crush** has deep red fruit that are very smooth, uniform and firm with a good flavor profile for a determinate grape tomato.

**Ruby Crush** has performed exceptionally well in field trials with less-than-ideal growing conditions. It produces a strong plant and if caged with adequate fertility will come out the top of a 4-foot cage. For several years it has been the best variety in the field even though it is a grape tomato. In addition, the variety will perform splendidly in a container. The fruit matures early, often 60 days from transplanting. Fruit weight ranges from 12 to 17 grams or about half an ounce.

The variety has a good disease package in that it has high resistance to fusarium wilt 1 & 2, fusarium crown rot and tomato mosaic virus. It is intermediate in resistance to gray leaf spot.

Seed is readily available from several online sources and transplants from local nurseries.

For ongoing educational opportunities, visit the  
**Bexar County AgriLife Extension Service** website:

[bexar-tx.tamu.edu](http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu)

# Getting a Head Start on Growing Your Own Tomatoes

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Have you ever wondered how some gardeners always harvest the first tomatoes of the season?

In most cases these “early bird” winners are “potting-up” their plants in one-gallon containers prior to setting them out in the garden for spring, when the soil and air temperatures have warmed up enough to support tomato plant growth and fruit setting (early March through the first week of April).

To “**pot up**” your transplants, fill your gallon black plastic nursery containers with a pre-moistened peat based potting mix. Enrich the potting mix with copious amounts of a slow-release fertilizer made especially for containers, such as an 18-6-12 Osmocote Plus analysis. If an organic fertilizer formulation is preferred, consider a 4-2-3 or similar analysis. The **key plant nutrient will be nitrogen**. If adequate plant fertility is not maintained, the tomato bush will be small, yellow in color and produce much less fruit.

Upgrade the transplants in the container. They can be planted deeply; tomatoes are one of the few plants that can tolerate deep planting. Adventitious roots will form along the whole stem. This is especially important if your transplants are leggy or top heavy. Start with healthy, dark green, well established transplants. They should **acclimatize to the wind and sun**.

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, so a small plant stake might be needed anchored to the main stem. 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**. That is why we start out with a Premium peat based potting mix. Watering frequency will depend on the water-holding capacity of the potting mix used and the plant size. Check the mix moisture by digging around in the pot—if you feel moisture—**DO NOT WATER**. Too much watering of young plants can cause roots to rot and you will have to get replacement plants. Also, you should apply a diluted water-soluble fertilizer, such as 20-20-20 or Hasta-Gro, at least once a week when watering. The high-quality potting mixes are very well drained so they usually will not become soggy. Reduce watering when the weather is overcast and/or cool. If the plant is subjected to more than a few hours of sub 40° F temperature it will stop growing. You will recognize this when the plant stops growing, and you see purplish coloring on the leaves. This condition often happens if you plant the tomatoes directly into the garden in early March and are not **covered with a plant cover like N-Sulate until mid to late April**.

To maintain the tomato transplant in a growing state, move it to **shelter** when temperatures below 40 degrees F. are forecasted, and winds are over 15 miles per hour. That may mean, moving the containers into the house on cold, windy evenings.

If you do everything as described above, your “potted up” plants will become quite large and may even begin blooming by **late March or early April**. The plants can then be **transplanted to the vegetable garden** or a much larger 20-inch diameter container. **DO NOT** let plants set fruit before moving to a permanent location. If fruit are allowed on transplants, the plants will be stunted when establishing them in the garden location. So, remove these early fruits for ample plant establishment! **DO NOT** apply organic **mulch around tomato plants** until **early May**, when soil temperatures have warmed. Then mulch two inches with an organic double shredded hardwood mulch that has some finished compost. If the plant is grown in a container, be sure to water and continue feeding every week with a water-soluble fertilizer as recommended on the label.

A tomato plant will **produce a higher quality fruit if caged**. Cages should be at least 4-5 feet tall with a 16-20-inch diameter. Anchoring the cages will

minimize the wind from turning over the cages. Drip irrigation is the best method to water. In six-to-eight weeks, you should be potentially harvesting up to 20 plus pounds of tomatoes and you will be the talk of your neighborhood!

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This information and more can be found at

**[bexarmg.org](http://bexarmg.org)**

Select Gardening Library

**Email: [info@bexarmg.org](mailto:info@bexarmg.org)**

Or call **210-631-0400**, ask to speak to a Master Gardener



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