

Extension Service Tomato Trials

by Tera Marshall, Bexar County Master Gardener



Photo credit: Lou Kellog

For more than 40 years, the Texas A&M Extension Service, under guidance of David Rodriguez and Dr. Larry Stein and with the help of Bexar County Master Gardeners, has conducted tomato trials to determine the best tomatoes to recommend for home growers and also for commercial growers. Each year's famed "Rodeo Tomato" comes from the results of these trials, too. These are the oldest tomato trials in Texas.

The trials are conducted on land at Verstuyft Farms near I-35S and 1604. Verstuyft Farms prepares the lands for the trials: providing tractors to plow the fields, fertilizing, maintaining, weeding and periodic watering.

Seeds are chosen from major seed distributors from the seeds available, and are raised to transplant size by Peterson Brothers Nurseries, and are then transplanted into the fields by Master Gardener volunteers.



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This year, the size of the trials has been scaled down due to limitations of COVID regulations. Trials are also limited by the varieties of seed available, as many seed distributors have stopped carrying older, more proven varieties of tomato seeds, and are now only carrying newer varieties.

17 varieties of tomatoes were trialed this year, and 100 plants of each variety were planted into 10,000 sq feet of field. Generally, determinate, bush type tomatoes are trialed,

although the last few years, some cherry tomatoes have also been chosen. Control tomato varieties are also planted: Celebrity, Tycoon and Valley Cat.

Celebrity is always used as one of the controls because it is the #1 planted tomato across the United States. The purpose is to trial new varieties against the controls, to see if they are as good or better than the control varieties.

Tomatoes are planted by Bexar County Master Gardener volunteers in mid-April, which is a little later than recommended to home gardeners, but will better put the plants through their paces for heat tolerance and fruit setting in hot weather.

Plants must have a good foliage cover, to protect the fruit from sun-scald, and are rated for disease resistance and productivity. Fruit is judged for firmness, color, and size.

Results from the trials are shared with seed distributors and also with commercial growers across the south, and are used as a basis for recommendations to home gardeners.



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The results of the trials will also result in each year's "Rodeo Tomato." Rodeo Tomatoes are sold at each year's rodeo, at the HEB Little Buckaroo Barn Master Gardener booth, and sales are used to fund horticulture scholarships.

Trials are held for tomatoes in the spring and the fall, and generally the same varieties and controls are used for both trials.