

## Heirloom Tomato Trials

Your horticulture agents have just returned from the 2006 Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference. This conference was for professional growers and those who advise them.

One of the most interesting sessions for the tomato-lover was the preliminary results of a taste and texture study by UK specialist Rick Durham.

This study consisted mostly of heirloom tomatoes. Heirloom plants are grown from seed that has been saved for generations and is open-pollinated. Plants grown from this seed will be identical to its parent unlike hybrids which will revert.

The subjects of the test were students who were asked to evaluate tomatoes for both taste and texture. This study consisted of 10 heirlooms and 6 modern hybrids. Each student tasted eight samples three different times. The

samples were viewed under a red light to hide any variation in color because many heirlooms are not typical reds, oranges and yellows. Heirloom tomatoes can be purple, brown, striped and spotted. Some participants might have been 'put off' by their looks.

This study will be repeated for 2 more growing seasons before the results are published.

Early findings suggest some tomatoes that you might want to try in your home garden or look for at farmers' markets and fresh produce sellers. 'German Johnson', 'Druzba', 'Arkansas Traveler', 'Early Girl', 'Big Boy' and 'Mortgage Lifter' received high marks from the students. It will be interesting to see which of these will still be rated highly after the three-year study is completed. Stay tuned.

If you would like information on locating mail-order seeds and growing heirloom tomatoes, please call the office at 569-2344.

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## Cold Weather Damage to Warm Season Plants

*Or Why You Really Should Wait Until May 10<sup>th</sup> to Plant Your Tomatoes*

Transplanting tomatoes too early can result in damage that will last the lifetime of the plant. Tomatoes stop growing and are susceptible to chilling injury at temperatures below 50 degrees. Chilling injury can show up after even short drop in temperatures.

The symptoms you may observe right after transplanting are purple leaves and/or purple veining, wilting, stunted plant and root growth. Transplants with restricted root growth (peat pots, cell packs) require at least two weeks after transplanting for their root system to enlarge to the point wherein active growth can begin. If it is too cold, root growth will not only be delayed but become stunted. There are long term effects on the health of the plant when exposed to cold.

Not all cool-temperature symptoms show up right away. Low temperatures experienced 4-5 weeks before flower bud development can be observed as failure to flower and set fruit.

Some fruits can be distorted, scared and puckered. These conditions have funny names—catfacing and zippering. The overall fruit production can be reduced by early planting.

Everyone worth their weight in compost wants to have their first tomato by July 4<sup>th</sup> not to mention the friendly competition among gardeners to produce the first one. You have just read several good reasons to resist the temptation to plant on Derby weekend. If you need some emotional support as you change these life-long habits, just call. We can talk.