

Seminar to teach how to grow tomatoes in Florida

If you've experienced difficulties in growing tomatoes in Florida, you're not alone. If you plan to grow tomatoes, you may want to attend a seminar titled **How to Grow Tomatoes in Florida** offered by the University of Florida Extension Office.

This seminar will be held at the Okaloosa County Extension Office, 5479 Old Bethel Road in Crestview from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m., March 26.

Correct variety selection is a key factor in successfully growing tomatoes in Florida.

Gerald Edmondson, UF/IFAS Extension Director and Agriculture Agent in Okaloosa County, emphasizes the importance of correct variety selection. "Home gardeners are having a difficult time growing tomatoes because of several diseases now affecting tomatoes in Florida. We have always had diseases such as Fusarium, Alternaria and Verticillium. But many common tomato varieties have some resistance to these diseases," he says.

Edmondson, who works closely with commercial tomato growers in our area, is seeing an apparent increase in disease occurrence. He says, "In recent years Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV) and bacterial wilt, which really wreak havoc in home as well as commercial plantings, have made it more difficult to grow tomatoes."

"Due to these problems, plant breeders have been working to develop varieties that have some resistance to these diseases," he explains. "They have had much more success with TSWV than with bacterial wilt." Edmondson encourages home gardeners to look for and request varieties that our commercial farmers have had success with in recent years.

"With tomatoes it's an all or nothing proposition as far as TSWV resistance goes." Edmondson clarifies, "Either a variety has resistance or it doesn't." He says, "It's unfortunate that our tried and true standard varieties do not possess resistance to this virus." He mentions, "We can recommend varieties to look for but there are not many of them in the home market, yet." In the meantime he says, "Homeowners may have to buy the seed and start the transplants themselves."

At this year's tomato seminar, we'll begin by sharing the basics of how to grow tomatoes in Florida's challenging environment. We'll also cover tomato pest control options, including non-chemical choices of combating the scores of tomato insect and disease problems.

In addition, we hope to have some Amelia tomato plants available for participants. Amelia is one of the newer varieties resistant to TSWV. It also has resistance to nematodes.

Please pre-register by calling the Okaloosa County Extension Office at 689-5850 or 729-1400, Ext. 5850 by March 23. There is a \$5 cost to attend. Space is limited.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, March 4, 2009