

Seminars 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 this year, you may want to attend one of two seminars titled **How to Grow Tomatoes in Florida** offered by the University of Florida Extension Service.

This year we are offering two seminars: one in Okaloosa County and one in Santa Rosa County. Both will be held on March 23rd. The first seminar will be from 9 a.m. to 12 noon at the Okaloosa County Extension Office, 5479 Old Bethel Road in Crestview. The second seminar will be from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Santa Rosa County Extension Office, 6263 Dogwood Drive in Milton.

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

One reason home gardeners have a difficult time growing tomatoes in Florida is because of incorrect variety selection. Most popular tomato varieties lack resistance to Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV) and bacterial wilt. These two diseases wreak havoc in home as well as commercial plantings.

Plant breeders develop varieties that have some resistance to these diseases. We encourage home gardeners to look for and request varieties that commercial farmers have had success with in recent years. We can recommend varieties to look for but there are not many of them in the home market, yet. Homeowners may have to buy the seed and start the transplants themselves.

At this year's tomato seminars, we'll share 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. The seminar in Milton will be geared more for small farm tomato production, including marketing of tomatoes.

We hope to have some tomato plants which are resistant to TSWV for participants to take home and try.

To preregister for the Crestview seminar, please call the Okaloosa County Extension Office at 689-5850 or 729-1400, Ext. 5850 by March 19. To preregister for the Milton seminar, please call the Santa Rosa County Extension Office in Milton at 623-3868 by March 19. There is a \$5 cost to attend. Space is limited.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, March 10, 2010