

## **A Tomato In Winter**

Part of the garden has come indoors for the winter. Being potted and pampered is apparently working – their color is good and they are blooming. Yet to be proven is their ability to set and mature fruit with limited sun exposure.

This venture actually began late last winter with a few seedlings that I got from George – yea that George. He started these Oregon Spring Bush Tomatoes and gave me some. I planted two in a garden bed and two in a pot that I kept on the back porch. My first experiment with outdoor potted tomatoes was successful.

The Oregon Spring Bush Tomato is a determinant – grows to size, blooms and produces fruit – but will produce a second crop in the fall if pruned back and fertilized. Since tomatoes are perennials in warmer winter climates, they will also grow again from the rootstock, bloom and set fruit if protected from freezing temperatures.

I started a second planting last summer, from seed that I saved and transplanted two plants in a large pot for winter. The plants are now (Jan08) about as tall as the potted ones that I grew outside last spring – 24”, and are full of promise.

## **Oregon Spring Bush Tomato**

The variety was developed at Oregon State University to bloom, set and mature fruit in cool nighttime temperatures. The fruit are mid-sized, red and firm when mature with a favorable acidic/sweetness balance. Mine also bloomed and set fruit last year without any noticeable blossom drop right through late spring and early summer (hot days and warm nights). It is one of the earliest producing tomatoes along with Early Girl and Better Boy, and has a similar flavor.

## **Two Plants - One Pot - Two Problems**

Last year I grew two plants in one pot, which complicated maintaining the correct amount of water in the fruit. Because of the difference in root mass between the two plants, the fruit on one was prone to splitting (too much water) while fruit on the other was prone to blossom end rot (too little water) – an unexpected demonstration of the relationship between soil moisture and fruit problems.

If you are interested in early tomatoes without a greenhouse – I expect ripe fruit in early March – try over-wintering an Oregon Spring Bush Tomato in a sunny area. They are proven pot tolerant, cold tolerant, short day tolerant, will bloom in mid winter and make a delightful houseplant – all that and fruit to boot.

## **Planting Schedules**

### **Winter Indoor Tomatoes**

Start seeds – July/August

Move indoors – Before first hard frost (move indoors over night when below 40F)

Move outdoors – After last frost (move indoors over night when below 40F)

### **Early Spring Tomatoes**

Start Seed – January

Pot up under grow lights until early March

Plant out with “walls-o-water” – March (harden them off for a couple of weeks first)

Remove “walls-o-water” – mid April (last frost) and cover with lightweight row covers\*

Remove row covers – July

**Pot Size** – about 5 gallons and at least 12 inches deep

**Caution** – pots need to be shaded from summer sun or double potted to maintain cool soil temperatures

\*Row covers protect plants from leafhoppers and spring winds. They also create a slightly higher humidity for the plants.

Till next time,

Darrol Shillingburg – January 2008

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