

OFE Growers Newsletter for March 24, 2022

This week is the first week of school after spring break and we start with our lesson on Tomatoes. It is somewhat of a challenge to grow tomatoes in the Houston area. Some say it is kind of a dance. Traditionally we start the tomatoes inside when the weather is too cold outside with the concern that, if cultivated too soon inside, the plants will get too leggy in search of the sun. In addition the plants will need to be acclimated to outside weather (sun and wind) before they can be planted in the garden. Why all this activity? It's our weather of course, spring is a short period of time in the Houston area with temps quickly getting to the high 80's and 90's during the day time and low temps at night. With the evening temperatures consistently staying in the 70's by late May, the tomatoes reach full fruiting potential. So tomatoes started in the gardens have a relatively short growth time in which to grow, flower, and set fruit. Remember day temperatures of high 80's and low 90's with evening temperatures in the 70's is ideal for tomato growth and fruiting. The growth period for reaching maturity and bearing fruit is approximately 75 - 85 days. That's almost 3 months. By starting our new tomato plants inside we can shorten the time in the garden to reach the fruiting stage. There is one other concern which is not often talked about but is very important and that is pollination. Pollinators will not be present when the weather is too cold and so there is a limit to how early we can plant and get fruit.

You may have noticed that we have many tomato plants in our main garden and some even have flowers on them. That is thanks to some very careful planning, planting, and protecting of the plants from some of the colder nights. But now the weather is turning warmer both day-time and early morning hours and so the tomatoes will begin to flower and the pollinators will begin to come. In fact, this last Thursday I thought I saw a number of solitary bees working in our gardens. Did any of you see them too?

Now is the time for planting a spring garden. We planted beans, cucumbers, and peppers this last week. We will continue to be planting more spring garden vegetables in the coming weeks such as squash and eggplant.

Lastly, I wanted to ask if any of you have been keeping track of our newly planted white potatoes? We are quite concerned about this crop. The "seed potatoes" do not seem to be growing. Out of all the potatoes we planted only one potato plant is showing above ground. We dug up a couple of the "potato seed" chunks and do not see any change in the "eyes". The potatoes do not show any signs of decomposing which is good but this much delay in growth could easily mean the crop won't be ready for harvest in late May.

See you next week and please take a moment to see how your tree is doing. I thought I saw some fresh new buds along many branches! Has anyone noticed the new buds on the lemon bush near the compost bins?