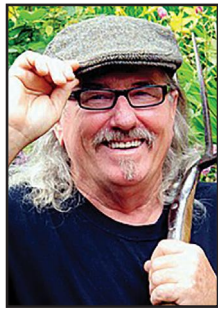


# It's legal to gamble in the garden

It's legal to gamble in the garden, which is good because I just threw money, effort, and hope at some tomato plants.

Yeah, though the horticulturist in me said hold off, it's early and we have until August to plant for a full fall harvest, my inner gardener couldn't help getting started. But then for years I wore a lapel pin that only half-jokingly proclaimed "Take my



**FELDER RUSHING**

but growing them is such a macho thing. I try to harvest enough peppers to freeze for when they hit a buck and a half apiece in the store, or dry them into seasoning flakes.

But - dare I admit this - I fall short of the pinnacle of gardening; in spite of being raised by a dad who grew bushes of them in just plain Delta topsoil and decades of working professionally with tomato growers, I can't grow decent tomatoes.

Tried it all. Planted by the moon in good garden dirt, in raised bed blended dirt and compost, in big pots and painted red for encouragement. Planted deep so they root along buried stems, staked and trussed-up vine-types and caged bush-types. Pinched out small suckers to leave just two or three strong stems, mulched with everything from bark to pine straw, watered deeply but not too often.

Fertilized with both commercial and organic nutrients and borderline-gimmicky Epsom salts, sprayed whiteflies and aphids, thumped big stinkbugs, plucked mini-dragon hornworms. Fought the various blights that cause plants to "fire up" with withered brown leaves, and prevented blossom-end rot with extra calcium.

Still, knowing I'll likely fail, I give it a go because



**FELDER'S PAINT BUCKET TOMATOES**

they give me hope. Occasionally I get a few fruits before they peter out or crack, or squirrels beat me to them, and I do surprisingly well with July transplants that produce better in Autumn's coolness.

I've even Sharpied smiley faces on green ones, in case that's as good as they ever get.

By the way, just as the "real mayo or Miracle Whip" debate will never be settled satisfactorily, no two gardeners can agree on the best variety to grow. Some like 'em sweet, or with an acidic bite. We grow big juicy slicers, firm-fleshed soupers,

and mouth-popping cheery types. There's a litany of favorite disease-resistant hybrids and exotic heirlooms; do an online search for Seed Savers Exchange or Baker Creek, and you'll dehydrate from salivating over just the photos and descriptions of what's available from seed.

Or just set out whatever varieties your locally-owned garden center folks carry based on what your neighbors come back asking for year after year.

They all grow about the same, given decent soil, sunshine, nutrients, staking or caging to keep them from sprawling, and water. And



**March 25** - Beckett Bond, Bettye Ware, Ann Edwards, Pablo Hernandez ST, Mary Kohn, Dalton Sheedy

**March 26** - Terrell Hammett, Whitman Sanders, Louis Ferrell, Valerie Hollins, Nat Hooker, Lydia Williamson, Courtney Steverson, Causey Johnson, J. B. McBride

**March 27** - Chandler Woo, Mike Steen, Halley Box

**March 28** - Roxann Malone, Glen Lawson, Landry Gardner, Wyn Diggs, Debby C. Meeks, Carolyn Love, Cortez Epps, Sasha Harrell, LaShunkeita Clark

**March 29** - David McBride, Antonio Bailey, Marvin O'Reilly, Kilpatrick Sims, Maggie Garrett, Kalen Joe, Dakota Webster, Cindy Gnemi Woody, Janet Martin, Jessie Williams, Mason Ables, Neal Frazier, Chanel Burns

**March 30** - Victor Gilbert, Debbie McLemore, Lance White, Cha'mylah Miller, Chanta Grayson, Carrie Dillon

**March 31** - Bro. Jack Wooten, Jim Harrell, Cartrina Benson, Bubba Spell, Jr., Sandra Jenkins, Tissie Brock, Agnes Williams



**March 25** - Marlin and Sarah Lowery, Garrett and Jenny Clare Holland

**March 26** - Christopher and Jennifer Truitt, Steven and Monica Green

**March 27** - Dale and Karen Powers

**March 28** - Andrew and Andi Frank

**March 30** - Gregory and Shinna Anderson

luck - all my horticulture knowledge, and for me it's still a gamble.

*Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Gardener" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.*

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