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Tobie Habeck (left) and Harry Olsen, of the Marion County Master Gardeners, discuss grafted vs. ungrafted watermelons at their test garden. This watermelons is grafted. Behind them are the tomato trials. KOBBI R. BLAIR / STATESMAN JOURNAL

VEGGIES, FRUIT ON TRIAL

The verdict on what to look for next spring

By Heather Rayhorn
Statesman Journal

Master Gardeners Harry Olson and Tobie Habeck put plants in the hot seat.

For the past two years, the pair have gathered the latest in grafted plants — in some cases fruit and veggies that aren't even available to the public yet — and filled a few plots at the Marion County Master Gardener Demonstration Garden on Center Street NE to see how they compared to each other.

This year, trials included seven early tomatoes in a search for the first to ripen and offered a look at all seven members of the 'Indigo' tomato family. Also being studied was a comparison of grafted and ungrafted melons and cucumbers.

The "first to ripen" trial included '42 Days,' 'Glacier,' 'Beaver Lodge Slicer,' 'Orange Blossom,' 'Early Girl,' 'Legend' and 'Stupice.'

People always want to know what will produce the earliest, said Habeck, who added 'Early Girl' is a popular choice, as the "early" in the name attracts a lot of people. But the earliest producer of the summer wasn't 'Early Girl' or fan favorites 'Legend' and 'Stupice.'

"We try to answer what to grow, and I think the answer is 'Glacier,'" she said about this year's early-tomato trials. The plant produced ripe fruit in 47 days and continues to produce in September. In comparison, 'Early Girl' took 74 days.

The other hot early tomato was a variety called '42 Days.' It is half the size of 'Glacier' in terms of fruit — a little larger than cherry tomatoes — and plant size, but Habeck was impressed.

"It's a small, dense plant, but it's an incredible producer," she said of the plant that got to about 2 feet by 2 feet. "I got 29 pounds off it one day."

"We tried to count the tomatoes once, and we gave up," Olson said. "It was probably 200."

'42 Days,' which like 'Glacier' actually took 47 days to produce ripe fruit, is a determinate plant, meaning it sets and



This is a grafted cantaloupe.

ripens fruit all at once, then dies, something Habeck said is good for those into canning.

Part of the studied tomatoes' success is most, including '42 Days' and 'Glacier,' were from grafted root stock. The technique, which is growing in popularity, grafts the upper portion of loved varieties with the bottom portion of a wild, vigorous stalk, such as a wild tomato in the case of tomatoes. The matchup increases fruit, fruit size, disease resistance and vigor, all while leaving the taste the same.

"Think of it as a nutrient pipeline," Olson said of the wild tomato stalk. "The larger root goes farther, absorbing all nutrients and water."

The trials of the 'Indigo' family, which was created at Oregon State University, lets you compare the family's seven different varieties. The 'Indigo' line is famed for being among the healthiest tomatoes. It has the same antioxidant (anthocyanin) found in blueberries, which cause both to turn bluish-black when the sun strikes it.

Habeck and Olson warned the whole tomato doesn't turn dark, however. The bottom will turn red when it is ripe.

'Blue Berry' and 'Kumquat' were Olson's favorites in the 'Indigo' line. He called them the sweetest.

But tomatoes aren't the only plants growing in the trial gardens. Cucumbers and the hard-to-grow-in-our-area melons also are on display with a comparison of grafted and nongrafted plants.

Olson said the grafted 'Senor' cucumber produced more and bigger fruit than the nongrafted variety. It's the same story with the 'Ambrosia' cantaloupe and the 'Crimson Sweet' and 'Alibaba' watermelon.

The melon trials were especially impressive, as the fruit is so hard to grow well in our area.

"The Northwest is just not warm enough, and it's too short a season, but the graft helps you in that," Olson said.

If you're ready to give grafted plants a trial of your own, you're likely to find them next spring at Wilco in Silverton, 13th Street Nursery in Salem, Al's Nursery in Woodburn or, for the largest selection, at Portland Nursery in Portland or online at Territorialseed.com. Olson and Habeck also hope to have a selection at the Master Gardener Sale next spring, but if they do, they will likely sell out on the first day. And expect to pay at least two to three times as much for a grafted plant.

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CHECK IT OUT YOURSELF

What: Early tomatoes, 'Indigo' tomato family and grafted vs. nongrafted melons and cucumbers are on display. Also, check out the cherry-size 'Bumble Bee' tomatoes, which are said to not split in the rain.

Saturday: Master Gardeners will be available to show off the trial garden and answer questions 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Where: Marion County Master Gardener Demonstration Garden, 3180 Center St. NE

Open to the public: The garden is open to the public daily during daylight hours. Signs explain what you're looking at.



Energy Trust discounts energy-saving showerheads

Statesman Journal

When it comes to saving energy around the house, a great place to start is with the daily shower, where energy dollars are used to heat the water you bathe in. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the average household can waste up to 2,300 gallons of water a year in showers alone, which adds up each month in energy costs.

To help Oregon utility customers save money from going down the drain, Energy Trust of Oregon is working with retailers around the state to

offer reduced prices on energy-saving WaterSense labeled showerheads in a variety of styles and finishes.

Showerheads with the WaterSense label are certified to be 20 percent more water efficient than standard showerheads, while offering the same or better pressure and performance. Changing just one showerhead to a WaterSense model can save up to \$44 a year in energy and water costs.

"Installing a more efficient showerhead is an easy change to make, and residents don't have to sacrifice performance or design," said Matt Braman,

residential program manager of Energy Trust. "Most people who make the switch would only notice a difference on their energy bills."

Discounted WaterSense labeled showerheads are available throughout Oregon at Bi-Mart, Fred Meyer, George Morlan Plumbing Supply, Goodwill, Grover Electric and Plumbing Supply, Habitat for Humanity ReStore, The Home Depot, Jerry's Home Improvement, Lowe's, Parr Lumber, The ReBuilding Center and Walmart.

Many WaterSense labeled showerhead models are avail-

able from \$14 to \$16. The discount is automatically taken at the register — no coupon is required.

Energy Trust recommends replacing any showerhead that uses more than 2 gallons per minute of water. Showerheads from before 1992 can use more than twice that amount, up to 5.5 gallons per minute, while WaterSense labeled showerheads can use as little as 1.5 gallons.

To learn more about Energy Trust discounted WaterSense showerheads, go to energy-trust.org/showerheads or call (866) 368-7878.

DOES YOUR SHOWERHEAD NEED TO BE REPLACED?

» Place a bucket, marked in gallon increments, under the showerhead.

» Turn the shower on at normal water pressure and temperature.

» Time how many seconds it takes to fill the bucket to the 1-gallon mark.

» If it takes less than 30 seconds to reach the 1-gallon mark, a water-saving showerhead would be beneficial.