



TWO SMALL FARMS

Community Supported Agriculture

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Been There, Done That, by Andy Griffin

It's late August and tomatoes are here. "Well, finally," some of you might say.

And I'd reply, "Better late than never," because I love tomatoes too, but over the years I've changed my mind about how I should grow them. For the last ten years I've followed the same schedule; we sow seeds in late January, transplant the seedlings into the field after the 15th of April when we can reasonably assume that the frost is done for the year, and then start harvesting at the beginning of August. This year spring was cold, there were late frosts, and for a few days in early May I was worried we were going to lose our crop before the plants even flowered. Our harvest is late by several weeks, compared to last year, but I'm not going to do anything special in the future to speed things up. Been there, done that.

In 1993, when I farmed with my friend, Greg, we tried to have early tomatoes by transplanting into the field in early March and protecting the tomatoes from the rain, wind, hail and frost by putting hoops of PVC pipe over the rows and covering them with plastic sheeting. The plastic had slits for ventilation. Results were mixed. The hoop houses were expensive and time-consuming to build. The plastic film caught the raw spring wind like a sail, and we had to anchor the hoop houses to earth during and after every storm. Despite the ventilating slits, conditions inside the hoop houses were moist and breezeless, so we had problems with fungal attack. We had an early tomato harvest that year, and we were able to get a premium price from impatient farmers' market customers (briefly) for our first crop, but we also had a depressing mess of dirty, torn plastic to throw away in the dump at the end of the summer. I don't want to do that again.

In mid-January of 1994 Greg and I went to Mexico to look into growing organic tomatoes for the early market. Our fields in Hollister were waterlogged and the sky was gray when we crossed Pacheco Pass and turned south on I-5. Down in Huron and Five Points on the west side of the San Joaquin the skies were still heavy, but the empty fields were dry. That evening, in the low hills outside of San Diego, we saw tractors preparing ground for the first stateside tomato plantings of the New Year.

At dawn the next day, on the outskirts of Maneadero, south of Ensenada, we saw the first tomato plants in the ground, but they were small, only six inches tall. Farther south down Mexican Highway 1, in the San Quintin Valley, we saw fields of knee-high tomatoes, but they weren't in flower. Gangs of workers walked the rows stabbing crooked sticks into the

ground to serve as tomato stakes, and other men followed behind unspooling twine and tying the plants up. We jumped back in the truck. Colonel, Camalu, and Colonia Guerrero slipped past; more dusty tomato fields, garbage blowing in the wind, and the occasional rooster strutting down the centerline of the highway, challenging fate and traffic.

Past Rosario the highway turns inland and enters the clean, open desert. We drove south. It wasn't until we crossed the Tropic of Cancer outside of Todos Santos in the State of Baja California Sur, nine hundred miles later and almost 1,400 miles south of Hollister, that we saw the first red tomatoes hanging on the vine. Land was for sale. Greg found a ranch, a thirty hectare field crisscrossed with power lines and watered with an irrigation canal and a well. He bought the land, and I helped him set the farm up.

America buys winter tomatoes, but the vegetables that make good rotational crops are not in demand, so Mexican farmers grow tomatoes year after year in the same fields while the soil-born pathogens multiply until the soil is so contaminated that it has to be sterilized with Methyl bromide to be usable at all. Greg's land had been fallow, and the soil was clean and alive, but the tropical pests like leaf miner were alive too. The business of farming starts with knowing the market, but good agricultural practices are about knowing what the land can do, not imposing market demands upon it, and we had a lot of learning to do.

Doing business in Mexico wasn't easy either. There weren't ready sources for organic fertilizers, packaging materials, or farm equipment. There were farm supply stores, but they couldn't afford to maintain an inventory of even the most obvious items, like drip tape, PVC pipe fittings, or aluminum gate valves. We could order what we needed, but delivery dates were uncertain, and some things might not arrive at all, so we had to ship most of what we needed down from Alta California. Because Baja is a tourist destination there are plenty of jets flying out of San Jose del Cabo, and you'd imagine it would be simple to book freight to any number of American cities, but the Mexican Airlines were indifferent to the notion of hauling cargo, and US carriers were over-booked.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about farming in Mexico was the labor situation. Greg and I had imagined that since so many Mexicans come to the United States to work that if we went to Mexico we'd have a ready, local labor pool to draw from. But Baja Californians don't want to work on farms any more than Alta Californians do. I saw lines of workers alongside the highway before dawn, shuffling off to get a day's work done in the fields before the temperatures got

This Week

Tomatoes MF

Sweet Peppers MF

Strawberries HG

Red Chard MF

Lettuce OR Spinach HG

Arugula OR Cilantro HG

Fennel HG

Mystery MF

Mystery HG

Flowers: Mixed Bouquet HG

hellish, but they were migrant Oaxacans from Southern Mexico where prevailing wages were only five dollars a day. Employers in Baja paid as much as seven dollars a day, so people came north to work, hoping to save enough money to buy their way across the international border into the land of seven dollars an hour. The Oaxacans lived in a squalid camp in the middle of the desert. Their huts were roofed with dried palm leaves, pieces of cardboard, and scraps of galvanized iron sheeting. There was a single rusty pipe and a water tap that dribbled.

Mexico had plenty of arcane regulations for companies to comply with, but enforcement of the labor code managed to be both lax and arbitrary at the same time. The same officials who threatened dire consequences to any employer who disrespected the dignity of the workers freely handed out the business cards of lawyers that could “pre-solve” disputes. The contrast between the hard working Oaxacan tomato pickers and the narcotic torpor of the authorities was stark. There are good companies doing good work in Mexico, and if it wasn’t for export business a lot of poor Mexicans would have no work at all, but I found growing off-season tomatoes in Mexico to be a depressing affair, and I was glad that it wasn’t my business.

Then, during 1996 and 1997, Greg and I grew organic winter tomatoes in a hot house. This was an interesting project, but even then energy costs were prohibitive. As I watch fuel prices surge I’m glad that when Julia and I started Mariquita Farm in 1998 I didn’t continue that form of tomato production. I had to try everything else first, but I’ve decided to plant tomatoes outside when the soil is warm, let the sun coax the fruit to ripeness, and deliver the harvest to my neighbors.

“Well, finally,” you might say.

And I’d have to reply, “Hey, better late than never!”
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Tomato and Sweet Pepper Salad, adapted from *The Vegetable Market Cookbook* by Robert Budwig

3 sweet peppers	4 ripe tomatoes
¼ preserved lemon (or 2 tsp. grated zest with some of the lemon's juice)	2 cloves garlic peeled and crushed pinch sweet paprika
½ tsp. ground cumin	1 TBS olive oil
1 TBS lemon juice	1 tsp. salt
½ tsp. black pepper	

Grill or roast peppers, remove skins, cut into small cubes and set aside. Blanch tomatoes for 15-20 seconds in boiling water. Drain and remove skins and stems. Cut in half and remove seeds. Cut into small cubes. Rinse the preserved lemon under running water and remove the pulp. Cut the rind into fine dice. Arrange peppers, tomatoes and lemon in a dish. Mix remaining ingredients to make a dressing and pour over the salad. Mix well.

Everything in your box and the flowers are organically grown. From Mariquita Farm: tomatoes, sweet peppers, red chard, mystery. From High Ground: strawberries, fennel, lettuce, spinach, arugula, cilantro, mystery, flowers.

Tomatoes for Sale 4 Ways!

Full Flats for canning, roasting, freezing, saucing, and sharing.

1) *Tomato U-Pick Dates* at Mariquita Farm in Hollister: September 6th, 11th, and 13th all from 9am to 1pm.

Tomatoes are 50¢ a pound. We'll have some other produce picked and for sale. Please bring a hat, plenty of water and sunscreen. We will have cardboard boxes for sale, but you're encouraged to bring your own bags, boxes or crates. All are welcome. No dogs, please. We'll print directions next week.

2) *Tomato Emergency Day* at Piccino in San Francisco (Dogpatch: 22nd at Tennessee) this Saturday, August 30, from noon -2pm. We have too many tomatoes (a tomato emergency!) Preorder only, email mariquitamystery@gmail.com to make your order. 4 kinds of Mariquita tomatoes and High Ground strawberries and padron peppers too. (I plan to make a Tomato Emergency day in Palo Alto in about 2 weeks. If you know of a good venue, let me know. Thank you! —Julia)

3) Mariquita Tomatoes available by pre order at the *Redman House Farmstand* on Fridays and Saturdays. Make your order from the list below and email Shelley with your order and which day you'll show up to the Farmstand. Mariquita tomatoes are offered at the stand by the pound any old time, just not likely all the varieties below. To get the below prices you have to preorder with Shelley at csa@twosmallfarms.com.

Pre-order list for the Redman Farmstand and the Piccino Tomato Emergency Day:

San Marzanos 20 pounds for \$28. similar to roma tomatoes, just a different, larger, pastier, variety, loved by chefs!

Heirloom Tomatoes 10 pounds for \$20. We choose varieties.

Beefsteak Tomatoes: 10 pounds for \$15

Early Girl Tomatoes: 20 pounds for \$28

4) *CSA Piggy-Back deliveries:* Santa Cruz County Thursday Pick-Up only: we can deliver cases of tomatoes to your pick up site: San Marzanos on Thursday, Sept. 4th and we can offer Early Girl Tomatoes on Thursday, Sept. 11th. Each variety is 20 pounds for \$28. Email Shelley to make an order for 9/4 (San Marzanos) and or 9/11 (Early Girls). Our trucks are full of CSA boxes on our other routes so we can't drop off at other pick up sites this time, sorry about that!

Pasta with Red Peppers, Lemon, Greens, White Beans, from *Eat More, Weigh Less*, by Dean Ornish

2 or 3 red or yellow peppers	Vegetable broth or chicken stock
Greens	Garlic
Lemon	Grated lemon rind
Pasta (I've used Orrechiette and Farfalle)	White Cannellini Beans (the recipe calls for fresh, but canned works fine)
fresh pepper	salt

Cook peppers in broth approx 8-10 minutes. Add greens, garlic, lemon and rind to taste. Cook till greens are wilted, about 5-8 minutes. Add white beans and bean liquid. Add fresh pepper, and salt to taste. Add cooked pasta, mix and enjoy!