

THE WSU ORGANIC STANDARD



The Tricks to Tomatoes (on the Palouse)

The tomatoes are finally on, a sure sign that summer did actually happen. While this summer has been cooler than normal, our hoophouse tomatoes are at least finally beginning to ripen. I joined the crew last week at the farmer's market and had a great time seeing the excitement from everyone over these long awaited treats. We had enough extra to sell at the market and will continue as long as we have them.

The outdoor tomatoes look great but are still very much in the unripe green stage. Claire has been busy pruning and trellising these tomatoes in hopes of encouraging some ripening.

We planted our outdoor slicers in a single row with 1-foot spacing between each plant. Once the plants get to



The outdoor tomatoes at the Farm, trellised to the hog panels.

size, we place 16-foot metal hog panels on the downhill side of the plants and attach it to T-posts. This framework provides support for the plants as we trellis the arms with plastic clips to the metal fencing. The fencing has 6-inch squares which allow for easy picking from either side.

The alternative trellis systems are tomato cages, which usually start to break after a season, or a homemade trellis consisting of some sort of post and string. The hog or cattle panels are a little pricey to get into, but the durability will make up for it in the long run.

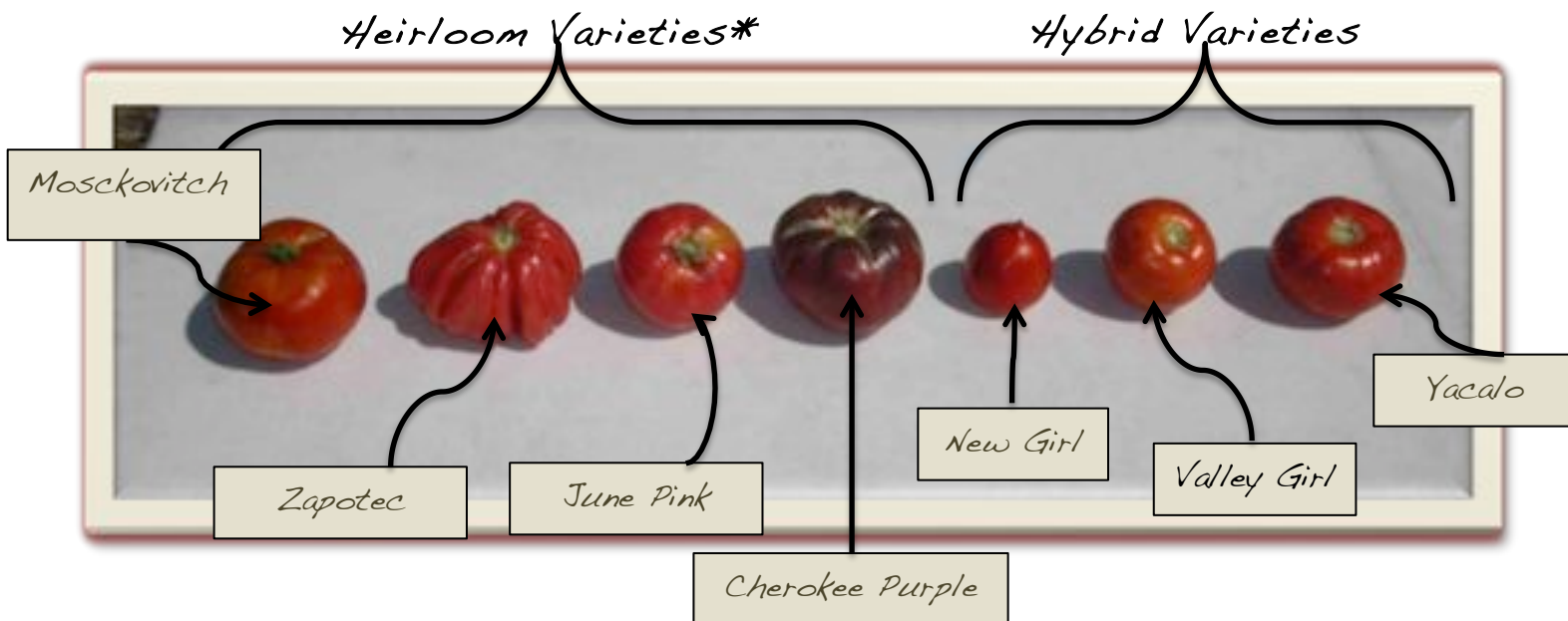
A good pruning tactic is to leave more foliage on the south side of the plants to help reduce sun-scald on the ripening fruit. This will occur when the fruits are exposed to intense direct sunlight and will form a blemish on the skin that will usually turn to rot. (Continued on next pg.)

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Last week we also started to transplant the fall brassica crops which will include broccoli, kohlrabi, bok choy, cabbages, and head lettuce. These are from the starts that we seeded back in July and nursed through the hot weather by keeping them in a small shade structure. The broccoli was the first to be seeded on July 7th and we've continued with additional seedings of the other crops, finishing with the last head lettuce planting last week. We are approaching the end of our seeding season and will be limited to direct seedings of salad mix, radish, turnips, and Asian greens in the field, finishing in early September. Crops seeded any later will not mature before the end of October. We have a new student interested in working on the winter greens production so stay tuned for more on how to grow through the winter and spring months!

~Brad



* Heirloom tomato plants are open-pollinated and their seeds will produce seedlings with the same traits as the parent plant. You can save and plant their seeds and get tomatoes with reliable characteristics. Hybrids come from cross-pollinating two varieties; their seeds may or may not result in plants like the one you initially collected from.

Sun Dried Tomatoes at Home

To save a little summer for the cold, dark winter, freezing or drying garden tomatoes is a great idea. For no-fuss freezing, simply wash tomatoes thoroughly and seal in plastic bags. They'll be great later in soups, sauces, or other recipes calling for crushed tomatoes. Drying tomatoes is another way and an easy way to preserve the tomato harvest. After washing and coring the tomatoes, slice 1/4"-1/2" thick and arrange the slices on a nonstick sheet. If you get a reliable 8-hours of sun somewhere in your yard, lay cheesecloth over the tomatoes and set the sheet out in that sunny spot. After 8-hours, flip the slices over and set them out for a second 8-hour day. If weather is uncooperative or your outside area too shady, your oven will also work well. Preheat it to 150 degrees, or its next lowest setting, and proceed with washing and slicing the tomatoes as you would for sun-drying. No need for the cheesecloth, just slide the sheets into the oven and leave them for 8 hours. Flip, and leave them for another eight hours. Tomatoes are done when leathery. If you plan to keep them for long-term storage (months), make sure the slices are brittle before transferring them to sealable jars or bags.

Three Recipes for Tomatoes

Marinated Tomato Salad

From *Sunset* magazine's June, 2005 issue.

3 tablespoons balsamic or red wine
vinegar
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 pounds mixed firm-ripe heirloom
or other tomatoes
3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint leaves
3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves
Salt and cracked black pepper

1

In a small bowl, whisk together vinegar and oil. Rinse and core tomatoes and slice 1/3 to 1/2 inch thick. Arrange in layers in an airtight container or on a serving dish, drizzling vinegar mixture and sprinkling mint, basil, salt, and pepper evenly over each layer.

Cover and chill at least 30 minutes or up to 4 hours. Bring to room temperature before serving.

Tomato and Sweet Onion Crumble

From Megan Wentworth, Portland, OR, in *Sunset Magazine's* August 2004 issue.

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 sweet onions (about 1 lb. total), such as Walla Walla.
3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
2 pounds ripe tomatoes, rinsed, cored, and sliced
1/4" thick
1/3 cup chopped fresh basil
3 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano leaves
Salt and pepper
4 slices crusty artisan-style bread cut into chunks
1/4 cup (1/8 lb.) butter
1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese

2

Heat oil in a 10- to 12-inch frying pan over medium heat. When hot, add onions and garlic. Stir frequently until onions are limp and beginning to brown, about 6 minutes. Pour into a 2- to 3-quart baking dish with sides at least 2" high, and spread onions level. Top evenly with tomato slices, basil, and oregano. Sprinkle generously with salt and pepper.

In a food processor, whirl bread with butter and cheese until mixture forms coarse crumbs. Sprinkle evenly over tomatoes.

Bake in a 350° oven until topping is golden brown and juices are bubbling, 20 to 25 minutes. Cool 5 minutes and serve warm.

Roasted Tomato Soup Recipe from 101cookbooks.com

- 5 tomatoes, cored (if necessary) and quartered
- 1 large red bell pepper, seeded and quartered
- 3 medium yellow onions, peeled, quartered
- extra-virgin olive oil
- 5 plump cloves of garlic, unpeeled
- fine-grain sea salt
- 2 - 3 cups light vegetable stock or water
- 1/4 teaspoon smoked paprika

3

- Preheat the oven to 375F degrees and position 2 racks in the middle of the oven.
- Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper, alternately you can just rub them down with a thin glaze of olive oil.

- Arrange the tomatoes, skin side down, on a baking sheet. Coat the bell pepper and onions with olive oil and put them on the other baking sheet along with the garlic, place the pepper skin side down as well. Give both sheets a light showering of salt, then bake until the tomatoes start to collapse and the onions start to brown and caramelize, about 45 minutes. Turn the onions if they start getting overly dark on the bottom . Check on the garlic as well, once the cloves are golden and oozy inside, pull them from the oven.

- Peel the garlic, dump all of the roasted vegetables into a big, high-sided bowl, and puree with a hand blender. Alternately, use a conventional blender or food processor and work in batches. Blend in a cup of the stock, and keep adding the rest 1/2 cup at a time until the soup is the desired consistency. A little chunk and texture to this soup is good, particularly if the weather has a bit of a chill, but smooth or chunky is your call. Add the paprika and a bit more salt if needed, adjusting to your taste.

- *Serves 4.*