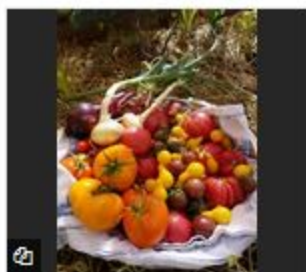


Make sauce, not war

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Still Life With Garden Tomatoes



Nate Downey

A collection of columns and writings by Nate Downey of PermaDesign. His writings appear in HOME: The Santa Fe Real Estate Guide.



I felt a tinge of panic pulsate through the ganglia in my back when it suddenly seemed as if we were going to be horribly late. Fortunately, my fear morphed into an amused and mellow joy when I dug up the necessary email. Our family had been randomly selected to bring “lettuce, tomatoes, onions, and other burger toppings” to the back-to-school picnic. This meant we could pick tomatoes, fill a bowl, and head straight to Desert Academy without that dreaded detour to the grocery store. Better yet, we could share our tomatoes since this year’s crop had done darn well.

Nightshades? I thought, You betcha! As one hand grabbed vines and the other plucked fruit, I found myself enjoying the idea that my seemingly generous labor was going to double as an act of unabashed laziness. With so much of the week’s harvest going to school-community stomachs, I would no longer have to squeeze tomato-sauce-making into an already busy weekend. Yay!

Sadly, those ever-predictable glitches associated with large, fun potlucks sent us to our car with half our tomatoes — not the empty bowl I expected. Back home, I thought briefly about the orange, red, and yellow horde still waiting to be picked in the garden, and I wondered how many fruit flies the bowl would attract overnight. After half-seriously covering the remaining harvest with a dish towel and heading to bed, I woke up at five in the morning with a premonitory startle and a mission: make sauce.

Elemental to permaculture philosophy is a principle that praises simplicity. When designing a landscape, a community, or a recipe, make the least change for the greatest possible effect. A recipe for tomato sauce from www.thekitchn.com that included only two ingredients, tomatoes and lemon juice, was soon calling my name. I particularly liked the part in Emma Christensen’s recipe about spicing your sauce to taste at every subsequent meal, depending on whatever’s for dinner.

The blanching and the peeling would take time, but at least I was not measuring this, grating that, or pinching whatnot. We didn’t have any lemons, but thanks to the margarita-drinking habits of some friends, we had lime juice. Everything was going smoothly as the sauce started its 60th minute of simmering, so before adding the juice (primarily used for preservative purposes) the sauce had to be tasted in its purest form.

The surface of the molten mixture glistened like a box of jewels as a wooden spoon cut the equinoctial sunlight pouring over the Sangres. Then, the sauce’s fragrance roared through my nostrils, lungs, and heart like a pride of rowdy lions. At the moment of truth, it was a Matisse for the mouth, full of bright, unique colors — distinct but part of a cohesive whole. When the hot liquid slowly spiraled down my throat, it secreted all the vigor of tequila.

Little did I know that permaculture’s power would explode from a simple sauce recipe. I know it may sound like an ominous proposition, but remember this: you don’t need a dozen ingredients or any skill to enjoy the relishes of life. Evidently, all you need is a garden.

Nate Downey, the author of *Harvest the Rain* and *Roof-Reliant Landscaping*, has been writing this column since 1999. He started his local landscape-contracting business, Santa Fe Permaculture, in 1993 and PermaDesign, a landscape-architecture firm, in 2010. Please join him at Collected Works Bookstore on October 8 at 11 a.m. for a Journey Santa Fe event.

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