

Journey School Food Community CSA Newsletter

Week Thirty-Five: September 15, 2007

Attack of the Killer Red Tomatoes

What a glorious record-setting week! All this late summer heat has really turned stuff on. This week we are going to talk tomatoes. Killer Tomatoes. Can you say 160 pounds of tomatoes that can't wait for the CSA distribution? Ripening has been progressing at a rather normal clip, in fact, harvesting had become a normal routine. You know about routines - after a while they are completed without real attention. Habit takes over and the mind wanders to other things and then all of a sudden reality strikes like someone flipping the switch and turning - **RED**.

Monday morning it happened. I swear it was like someone had just turned on the Christmas lights. The whole tomato hoop house was decorated with KILLER RED TOMATOES hanging from electric green vines. Boatloads of tomatoes like on National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation when Clark Griswold plugs in the lights and the whole house lights up and causes the power company to fire up the auxiliary nuclear generator. I panicked. What was I thinking when I planted and manured all those tomatoes last May and what am I going to do with eight boxes overflowing with brilliant red killer tomatoes. I did what Clark and every other red blooded American relies on in times of need - cheap energy - to bale me out. Instead of an auxiliary nuclear plant, I fired up the propane stoves (all three of them) and commenced canning not even thinking about the dinosaurs. Of course, I did keep in the back of my mind that if overwhelmed, I could freeze the tomato puree for later processing.

The six cases of salsa didn't bother me too badly. The tomatoes were crushed and peeled in our hand-powered food mill, and we borrowed an electric food processor (thanks Jane!) for chopping the peppers, onions, and garlic. Preservation by canning seems perfect for us because it requires intense energy use up front and none later when we will be living off grid without a freezer. Even after all that salsa, I was still confronted with over 100 pounds of Killer Red Tomatoes rapidly going south and few empty jars in the canning closet. I turned to making ketchup and sauce, which requires tremendous time and energy to condense 8 gallons of tomato puree into 2 ½ gallons of sauce.

So here I am, after the hoop house full of Killer Red Tomatoes is safely locked up in pint jars, sitting back with a favorite beverage contemplating past and future tomato campaigns. I can still remember when we used to purchase tomato products from the store without even thinking of organic alternatives. In the last several years, Journey School has strived to put local organic nutrition on the family table, and now Journey School is concerned about the carbon footprint which that dinner demands. Ever aware that cheap energy will not always be here in our time of need, we plan to create solar food dryers and rocket stoves (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rocket_stove). We anticipate still having tomato sauce and ketchup, but intend to use sun-dried tomatoes to thicken the sauce and sticks to fire our canner. I truly believe that with appropriate technology and proper forethought, the energy decline can be met with grace and good spaghetti.

Pesto for Christmas – The easiest way to preserve the Summer abundance of basil is to make a very simple pesto and freeze in pint freezer bags. Simply chop the basil and garlic separately in a food processor, stir in a good quality olive oil to help preserve the aroma and flavor, spoon into the freezer bags, and pop into the freezer. When you are ready to use, let thaw, then add chopped nuts, a good dry cheese, and perhaps some coarsely chopped olived. Yum!

Recipes from Sunsets Barbecue Cook Book

Tomatoes and Peppers

Cut Bell Peppers into 1-inch squares, discarding the course membrane and seeds. Cook in olive oil until soft and slightly browned. Pour off any excess oil and add as much peeled and chopped tomatoes as there are peppers. Season with salt and pepper and slowly cook for 20-30 minutes.

Zucchini Skillet Stew

½ cup hot butter or salad oil
1 ½ pounds zucchini, cut in 1 inch pieces
2 green peppers, cut into ¾ inch pieces
2 large onions, sliced into rings ½ inch thick
1 large or several small tomatoes
Salt and Pepper

Heat oil in large skillet and zucchini, peppers, and onions. Saute' over medium heat for 15 minutes. Add tomatoes. Cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Salt and pepper to taste.

Tomato Catsup from Putting it Up With Honey by Susan Geiskopf

½ cup chopped celery
1 cup chopped onions
18 lbs. Tomatoes, washed and stemmed
3 Tablespoons salt
1/3 cup honey
1 tablespoon paprika
½ tablespoon cayenne pepper
1 tablespoon powdered mustard
2 cups vinegar
1 tablespoon whole peppercorns
1 tablespoon whole allspice
1 table spoon mustard seed
4 bay leaves
4 small hot chilies
1 tablespoon dried basil

Cook the tomatoes, celery, and onions until soft. Press the pulp through a sieve to measure 7 quarts. Put the tomato puree in a pot with salt, honey, paprika, and cayenne. Blend powdered mustard with a bit of tomato liquid to prevent lumping and add it to the mixture. Tie all the spices in a cheesecloth bag and add to the mixture. Simmer (forever it seems) until thick. Add the vinegar during the last 15 minutes of cooking and remove the spice bag. Spoon hot into hot sterilized jars to within ½ inch of the tops. Complete seals. Process for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath.