

The Joy of Growing Tomatoes

I like to grow tomatoes. No, I love to grow tomatoes. For decades I have grown big beautiful tomatoes in my garden. It used to be that I would buy seed and start my own tomato and pepper plants in the middle of February. I took little Styrofoam cups, filled them with dirt, put a single seed in each one, and then put them around every window in my house. Then I would water them every couple days and wait about ten days for the first sign of growth. When I saw those tiny sprouts coming out of the ground, I got kind of excited. I continued to water them and watch them grow each day, noticing a few more stems and leaves. By April the plants had outgrown those cups and I had to transplant them into bigger containers and usually cut off milk jugs where I could put four plants. I have to admit, it got pretty messy at times, but I tried to make sure I cleaned up all the dirt that got scattered around.

By May the plants were getting huge and every window sill was covered with these large green plants. I couldn't wait for a couple warm days so I could transplant them again out in the garden. When I started this project in February, I would buy a couple small packages of tomato seed and each package held about twenty-five seeds. So now I had some fifty tomato plants to get in the garden because I sure wasn't going to waste all the hard work that I had invested up to this point. I also had started about twenty pepper plants that needed a place in the garden to grow as well. Now the problem was that I didn't have a lot of garden space so I had to jam all these plants about a foot apart from each other.

As the spring moved into summer my gardens usually looked a lot like an African jungle. Cucumbers were a must in my garden too and I always grow a couple long rows of green beans, some onion sets, potatoes, peas, broccoli, and cabbage as well, but my biggest crop has always been those tomatoes. When August comes, I announce to my wife to be ready because we are going to have a bumper crop again this year. There was no such thing as a dry year because I always ran the sprinkler, so they had plenty of water. I knew there was going to be a big harvest every year. My poor wife would cringe because she knew that just about the time she was going to be heading back to her classroom to teach in September, I was going to be bringing two or three five gallon buckets of these big red balls into the house for her to tackle. She would blanch, skin and can them within a couple days or they would start to spoil. She almost always came through in a big way. There were a lot of late nights in the kitchen chopping up onions and peppers and listening to the sound of the canning lids popping as they sealed.

I think what kept her going is that she loves to make goulash and chili in the fall and winter from the canned tomatoes, so even though it was a ton of work, she is always able to complete the task. Sometimes we do close to fifty quarts in one year.

Now I don't start my own plants anymore and I don't grow so many. In fact, I even try really hard to space them out about three feet apart so there's more room for the weeds. With all the rain and heat this year, the plants grew so huge that my garden still looks like a jungle. Well tonight I brought my first five-gallon bucket into the house, and my wife didn't give me that look of desperation. She no longer has a daily classroom to attend to so she's ready to roll.

The Bible talks a lot about believers growing in their faith. We can't grow unless we are fed and watered. I would urge all of us to keep reading the word of God and find a good study Bible to help you understand it. The growth will be amazing. Until next week, God bless.