

# On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



All cooks know that old cliché that a watched pot never boils. And this gardener has long been convinced that a watched tomato never ripens.

There's no produce we personally wait for from the garden with more impatience than that first fresh, sweet, red-ripe, home-grown tomato. In an effort to hasten the home-grown tomato harvest, I've tried just about everything to jump-start Mother Nature's own ripening schedule. But to little avail.

I've started tomatoes in the greenhouse in January and found they ripen with fruit no faster than the April-started seedlings. I've covered them with frost-protection blankets. I've built plastic bag tents around young tomato plants,

with containers of water tucked inside the "tents" to ward off chilly nights and encourage fruit set. I've even tried a supposedly cold-set, Arctic-type, early-ripening variety, only to have the old standard Early Girl plants beat 'em to the red-ripe finish line.

This year's effort was determined as ever, though years of losing the "ripe by first-week of July" race has left me wiser, if no less impatient for that first picking. The Early Girl plants looked super by early May and the row of black plastic went down in good time to warm the soil, despite the late, wet, cold spring.

Then, in a weird turn of first-time-this-ever-happened events, the field sprayer passing the garden enroute to the sweet corn next

door accidentally discharged a slight misting of corn herbicide over a small corner of the garden.

It was the little section of garden where my half-dozen prized well-started, vigorous Early Girl plants snuggled down in their cozy hurry-up-the-ripening, plastic tents.

Luckily, just about every tomato seed I'd planted in the greenhouse starting flats had germinated. Within a few hours of the mishap, the earlier question of where this tomato seedling overrun was going to go was no longer an issue. Remaining Early Girl seedlings, considerably smaller than their larger siblings because they had germinated later, found homes in some spare space in the far, opposite corner of the garden.

Then it turned chilly. And, then it turned dry and desert-hot. And in between, I nearly cooked the tomato replants by trying to hasten them along under a frost-protection cover - which I forgot to remove until late afternoon one busy, sun-splashed day. With heartfelt apologies, I rushed in the garden bearing buckets of water to try coaxing the wilting tomato plants out of heat stroke.

Despite all my "help," the tomato plants have grown into thick bushes of stems and leaves, covered with fat, green tomatoes. Take note: green. None has yet shown the slightest inclination toward ripening to that beautiful red, juicy

readiness. Once again, I'm an also-ran in the competitive, early-July, ripe-tomato race.

Sometimes, I guess we just try too hard to rush certain things that

can't be rushed.

And if Mother Nature is trying to teach me patience, she's surely convinced by now that I'm an awfully slow learner about the fruitlessness of hurrying-up tomatoes.

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## Week-Long Trip

(Continued from Page B3)

right. A quick glance at the shore showed we were making progress, but the canoes ahead seemed smaller.

When we finally arrived on the other side of the lake, two canoes were ahead of us. We waited for the fourth, slightly out of breath, but with a feeling like we'd just passed a major test of our skill and endurance.

Looking Back

During this trip, I had been too

busy looking and learning to specifically track our progress. Afterward, in reviewing our route on the map, we had dipped our paddles in at least 27 lakes. But the actual distance was only 35 miles.

The leisure to watch the changing scenery as we paddled or rested in a campsite gave me a new appreciation for the work God carries on each day. I came back assured that God has a long-term perspective on us. And I'm glad to be part of the creation.

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