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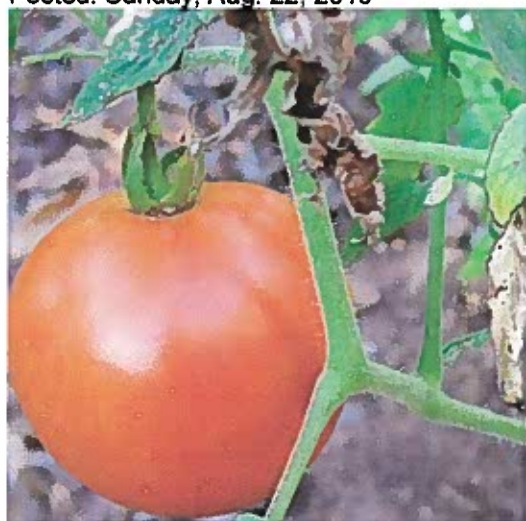
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## Yes, I have no tomatoes this year

**Heat wave of 2010 was too much, even for this experienced gardener.**

Posted: Sunday, Aug. 22, 2010



Better days - one of last year's bountiful crop. MICHAEL J. SOLENDER PHOTO

I play poker every other Tuesday with a group of suburban types. A couple of Tuesdays ago, my pal Jeremy - that week's host for the game - asked me to bring some tomatoes from my garden.

"The ones you had last year were just incredible," he told me. "Surely you have a bumper crop this year."

Ah, no, I don't. It is official. This is the worst year I have ever had in terms of tomato production. According to the Observer's garden expert, Nancy Brachey, "High daytime temperatures in the 90s can halt pollination of the blooms because the pollen, normally dusty, gets sticky and doesn't move around within the bloom."

She suggested "tapping the blooms with a pencil" to get the pollen moving. Trouble is, when I brought my No. 2 soft-lead out to my south-facing plot of dirt, it spontaneously combusted.

I lost count of the number of 90-degree-plus days this summer when we passed 40. The bees at my place in South Charlotte are taking this summer off. According to a couple of yellow jackets I overheard just last week, July in Canada's Maritimes was "pure bliss."

None of this would be so bad if I didn't have a legacy to maintain. Every summer, my neighbors, poker pals, golf buddies, even my mailman, look to me for some prime home-growns.

City boy that I am, I live for homegrown tomatoes. Each and every summer I grow my own. Tiny patches of dirt from Los Angeles to Winston-Salem and a little blood, sweat, tears and toil from summers of care. All in the pursuit of a tomato that doesn't taste like leftover planks from a shad-roe picnic and barbecue.

Just how bad has my season been? Kids with measles have more red circles on their face than I have in my garden. Thirty starter plants ordered from the venerable Burpee Seed of Pennsylvania produced less than 10 pounds of tomatoes as they strained, half-prostrate in the heat. Fifteen plants produced exactly zero fruit. Half of the rest offered up anemic, woody, lousy facsimiles.

This year, there was no homemade marinara sauce, no gazpacho, no tomato risotto, no caprese salads and, painfully, no BLTs. I began to hide from my neighbor rather than admit my garden failures. It's so bad this year even the ubiquitous whiteflies haven't made so much as a token appearance. Maybe they're embarrassed to be seen in my garden.

Ironically, the season started with such promise. My starters arrived on my birthday in late April. This was auspicious, a good sign, I thought, that bounty was assuredly right around the corner.

Two weeks earlier, two burley dudes from Union County worked up my once brick-hard clay garden with tillers into a compost-enriched, manure-laden bed of welcoming earth.

My tiny seedlings practically leapt from their clam-shell packing into the pool of nutrients that beckoned. May, if you recall, was actually quite cool. A nice amount of rain, and I was ever hopeful as my plants were looking mighty stout come the end of June.

Gardeners you see are an optimistic lot. Like beaming bridesmaids awaiting the toss of the bride's bouquet, we see nothing but promise ahead, goodness and rewards so plentiful and abundant that we'll have to share our good fortune with others.

I tried to keep up, I watered diligently, but the Charlotte heat wave of 2010 was simply too much. When faced with the ugly realities of life and death in the brutal fire of summer's belly, I finally just threw in the towel.

There is, however, next year, and next year may just be my best tomato crop yet.

You just wait and see.

Michael J. Solender is a local freelance writer who covers Charlotte neighborhoods. Reach him at [michaelsolender@gmail.com](mailto:michaelsolender@gmail.com).



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