

# Optimistic about this year's tomatoes

By Michael J. Solender

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One of the few prudent agrarian decisions I made as an adult, was marrying a farmer's daughter.

My wife is a product of one of Wisconsin's finest dairy farms.

She could successfully navigate her way around the vegetable garden and that ended up paying dividends that I harvest to this day. You see I am searching for the perfect tomato.

And my wife is helping. As they say in North Carolina, "Bless her heart."

"Starters," she said, "The only way to go with this poor excuse for soil we have."

Red brick clay isn't what they have in Wisconsin gardens. The soil there is loamy, teeming with nutrients and is black.

Starters it is. Not just any starters, but the imported variety from a fancy seed catalog in Pennsylvania.

Recently, two days after the teaser notice trumpeted their pending arrival from UPS, they arrived. Thirty starter plants in a wonder of packaging that can only be described as a tomato sarcophagus. There were Super Sweets, Early Girls, Better Boys, Orange Wellingtons and Teardrop Yellows. All hybrids, genetically engineered to stand up to the pounding heat and humidity in my SouthPark garden.

I've got Franken-tomatoes.

Tomato sandwiches, Caprese salads, rich spaghetti sauce are all within my grasp. April and May's tender care will yield countless BLTs, gazpacho and my infamous tomato risotto.

As is my custom during the summer when my crop is bountiful, I eat tomatoes for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I try to rationalize my behavior noting gluttony is certainly sinful, yet I have more than two-thirds of the year without home grown tomatoes.

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After all what is a farmer if not an optimist? My wife simply looks at me, my knees soiled red, and shakes her head.

Bless her heart.

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