



Life lessons, taught by tomatoes.

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The tomatoes have been generous this year. We harvested a slew of cherries, including sungolds, sweet millions, and a bounty from one sturdy volunteer in the compost pile. It reminded me that it was one of our favorites last year? a teeny, lemon-colored bunching yellow. We also got a basketful of bigger Brandywines and green zebras. (Apparently I was too busy eating them to take any pictures.)

We picked every tomato that showed any promise at all before hurricane Irene blew through. That was a good thing: Most gangly branches were stressed? and several snapped from the wind and falling pine boughs during the storm. Most of the bigger fruiting plants went south after that. There were a lot of them.

Still, I'd picked A LOT of tomatoes. The shallow bowls full of fruits in every stage of ripening stared at me. I felt guilt when I couldn't (or wouldn't) deal with them. So, my family held an intervention. This year's garden was big, to be sure. It included the usual frustrations of woodchucks and bed construction and whole zones of heavy clay. But what I realized, through some prodding, is that manageable = enjoyable.

We decided to limit ourselves next year to only the things we know we grow well and are easy to gather? and process. I realize that too many tomatoes makes me feel bad; I can't keep up with the pruning, the staking or the harvest. And the *smell* of rotting tomatoes makes my hair stand on end. So I plan to plant fewer of the winners. For us, that amounts to 10. (I totally neglected many of the 32 we grew this year, hanging out near the stakes, below.) I'll be able to really prepare for and nurture them, and I know they'll be healthier and more productive for it.

I even have a plan for next season that I can start right now. I read in Barbara Pleasant's amazingly useful book,

[Easy](#)

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Easy Garden Projects to Make, Build, and Grow that one of the simplest, low-maintenance ways to fertilize and prepare your tomato bed is as easy as this:

- Remove the plants that were growing in the bed where your tomatoes will be next year. (By crop rotation mandate, they shouldn't return to the same bed, if you can help it.) Turn the soil by hand and mix in an inch or two of compost, old leaves, grass clippings or other soil amendments.
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