

I say tuh-may-toe

While wallowing through the Supermarket of Too Many Choices I halted in the produce aisle and stood transfixed by four varieties of tomatoes: the beefsteak, the grape, the cherry, and the plum, all of them the pale orange hue of a dusty sunset over the Nevada Proving Grounds.

Why, I thought, are tomatoes named after animal parts and fruits? The cherry tomatoes were of no particular interest because they were the size of cherries in much the same manner as ping pong balls. The grape tomatoes would pass through a screen designed to sort grapes. The plum tomatoes fit the size and the shape criteria, but everywhere east of Great Falls these same flat tasting marinara basics are known as Romas. The beefsteak variety sported a dull pink hue and was the size and firmness of a baseball. (Note to the tomato marketing folks: Why scare off an entire vegan community with that name? Meanwhile, fire the person who came up with the idea of selling little attached pieces of tomato vine at the same per pound price as the fruit.)

A sliced tomato on white bread with mayo, salt and pepper is my favorite sandwich, but tomatoes at 45 degrees north latitude in late February will surely disappoint, so I elect to spend wages on a cluster of ten index-finger-length yellow fruit called “baby bananas” at two bucks a pound. (Another note: Baby bananas at two bucks per pound taste like regular old pit run bananas that go for 58 cents per pound, but one must eat three of the little critters in order to get the same thrill.)

I have done a few sandwich-free days’ research into tomatoes in the ongoing effort to advance human knowledge among the readers of this column, or, at very least, to provide the wallflower with

TOMATOES ARE HEALTH FOODS. THEY RANK 16TH AMONG ALL FRUITS AND VEGETABLES AS A SOURCE OF VITAMIN A, 13TH IN VITAMIN C

cocktail party conversation. Here are my discoveries:

No one in Europe, Africa or Asia had tasted a tomato until the Spaniards, in their quest for gold, found this Latin American member of the Solanaceae family (eggplants, potatoes, deadly nightshade) under cultivation in Mexico in the early sixteenth century. The earliest mention of the tomato in European literature is found in an herbal written by Matthiolus in 1544. He wrote that they were “eaten in Italy with oil, salt and pepper.” Although not specifically documented, early tomatoes were probably yellow, small fruited, (grape) and had a rough skin.

English authors referred to the tomato as an ornamental plant as early as 1578. One English cultivator wrote in 1596, “these love apples are eaten abroad,” but went on to describe them “of rank and stinking savour.” (He must’ve been shopping at my supermarket.) The first cookbook to mention tomatoes was published in Naples in 1692. By 1700, seven types are mentioned in one article. In 1752, English cooks used tomatoes sparingly in the flavoring of soups. In 1758, a tomato recipe showed up in the popular British cookbook “The Art of Cookery” by Hannah Glass.

The tomato plant bears a good resemblance to deadly nightshade, the source of belladonna, which has been used as a hallucinogenic drug. The trippy properties of belladonna, including visions and the sense of flying, most likely led to the association of nightshade, and its cousin the tomato, with witchcraft. Old German folklore has it that witches used plants of the nightshade family to evoke werewolves, a practice known as lycanthropy. Older German texts call the tomato a “wolf peach.”

In the 18th century Carl Linnaeus (remember him from high school botany?)

conjured up a way to name species and took note of the German legend when he named the tomato *Lycopersicon esculentum*, which literally means, “edible wolf peach.”

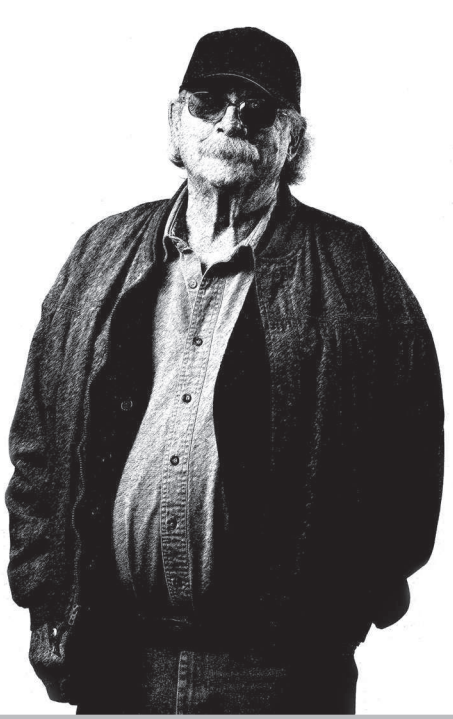
Tomato plants were brought to North America by colonists as ornamentals from Britain, the fruits of which were most valued for removing pustules. (I’ve not tried tomatoes on pimples.) In 1781, Thomas Jefferson brought tomatoes to his table. George Washington Carver, the peanut butter wizard, advocated tomato eating to his Alabama neighbors in an effort to improve their vitamin-deficient diet.

Early efforts to peddle tomatoes were not all that successful. One account has it that the fruit was first brought to Salem, Massachusetts, in 1802 by a vendor who had difficulty even convincing society people to taste the fruit because it was considered a poison. This was not without substance because upper class folks ate off of pewter plates, the acid in tomatoes would leach the lead out of the pewter and folks got stupid and sick. Poor folks were not affected because they ate from wooden plates.

Doubts about the safety of the tomato were put to rest in 1820, when Colonel Robert Gibbon Johnson announced that at noon on September 26 (prime tomato season), he would eat a bushel of tomatoes in front of the Boston courthouse. Thousands of folks turned out to watch the poor man die after eating the poisonous fruits, and were disappointed when he lived.

Tomato production in North America began to boom in the early 1920s with the advent of industrial canning and the invention of juice extractors. Shortly after, a young entrepreneur named Joseph Campbell found a ready market for canned tomato products, and went on to make gazillions with his soups.

The top five tomato-producing countries of the world are United States, China, Turkey, Italy and India, in that order. Florida, California and Georgia are the top producing states, with about 250



J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

square miles under cultivation per year. An estimated 35 million backyard gardens across the country grow tomatoes.

Tomatoes are health foods. They rank 16th among all fruits and vegetables as a source of vitamin A, 13th in vitamin C, and because we eat a lot of tomatoes are the most important provider of these two vitamins in the western diet. The tomato also contains significant amounts of lycopene (an anti-oxidant that snuffs out free radicals whatever they are), beta-carotene, magnesium, niacin, iron, phosphorus, potassium, riboflavin, sodium and thiamine.

Now, if we could only buy a tomato in March that tasted better than a tennis ball.

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J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.

Spring is for planting – if you must

Pendleton Tree Commission

As the first warm days of spring arrive, most homeowners turn their attention to their yards. We see all sorts of potential in our lawns, flower beds, and dormant vegetable gardens and we have at least 6 months of growing season in front of us.

It is only natural, then, that we also think about planting. The Pendleton Tree Commission would like to share a few ideas about spring tree planting.

First, recognize that spring is not the optimum time of year for planting trees in our climate. Trees planted in the fall have several months for their root systems to adjust to their new home before the leafing canopy begins making demands for water and nutrition. For this reason, the autumn is a better time for tree-planting.

However, nursery owners will tell you that spring is the peak season of demand for residential trees. Perhaps it is because the fall is never long enough to do all we want before winter sets in, but for whatever reason, spring tree planting is here to stay.

So, if you must plant trees immediately before the warm, dry summer, there are a few steps to take that can improve the chances of having a beautiful, healthy tree in your yard, one that can bring you and your neighbors many years of pleasure.

First, what kind of tree do you want? Tree species that are native to our area, or at least native to northeastern Oregon, will require less water, fertilizer, and care over their lifetime while providing habitat for native wildlife. Ornamentals can provide striking and unusual beauty. Fruit trees can bear a summer and fall bounty, but bring their own challenges in terms of spraying requirements and cleanup of fallen fruit. Large, leafy trees provide quality shade in summer while allowing sunlight through in winter, but add to the fall chore of raking for you (and your downwind neighbors!).

The Pendleton Tree Commission provides some suggestions in terms of tree species and proper location on the Pendleton Parks and Recreation website — look in the FAQ section for a link to the “Right Tree, Right Place” document.

Next, consider the location. Is your planting site below overhead powerlines that will eventually cause the tree to be topped? A topped tree is generally unsightly, can develop new weak branch growth that is dangerous, and will lead a shortened life. Selecting a suitable type of tree and then pruning it properly is a much better approach.

Are you absolutely certain about the location of underground utilities near your digging site? You don’t want to cut through underground wires or pipes when planting your tree and it is also important to consider the eventual rooting zone of your tree so as to avoid future conflicts with buried utilities and sidewalks.

Trees exposed to the hot south and west sun, especially with concrete nearby to



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
A honey bee flies up to harvest nectar from a blossom in a tree in April 2018 on Main Street in Pendleton.

reflect heat, can suffer sunscald — so be prepared to protect the young, tender bark under these conditions.

The hole you dig for your new tree should be a shallow, dish-shaped hole, just as deep as the root ball and 2-3 times as wide with sloping sides. Don’t plant your tree too deep — look for the trunk “flare” where the stem meets the roots, and plant this just at or slightly above ground level.

Place the tree gently in the hole (carrying it by the root ball, not by the trunk). Step back and view from several angles to ensure the tree is straight before beginning to backfill. Fill soil in and around the tree progressively, gently packing the soil to remove air pockets.

Once the soil is at the top of the root ball, smooth and level the site and form a shallow basin at least as wide as the root ball. Water the tree by filling the basin, but do not fertilize at planting time. Remember that trees are generally water-stressed at planting because they have been recently pulled from their nursery bed, and many of its important small, fine roots have been torn or cut in the process. Keeping the tree watered is important.

Mulch, if selected correctly, is a valuable addition. Organic mulches (bark, compost, etc.) placed 2-4 inches deep insulate the soil from temperature extremes, improve soil quality and nutrition, and make water

more available to the young tree. A large mulched area also reduces the potential for damage to the tree from string trimmers or lawnmowers.

Inorganic mulches like rocks, sand, and plastic are generally not a good idea — they tend to increase soil temperature and do little to improve soil quality or water holding capacity.

Trees should be staked only if absolutely necessary and only for the first year. Be sure that the apparatus does not damage the tree bark by constricting or cutting into the tree, and remember that the tree’s circulatory system and tender growing material lie immediately under the bark.

Lastly, be patient with your newly planted tree. Trees moved to a new environment tend to focus their energies on growing roots for the first few years so that they can provide new crown with nutrients and water. Only then will the tree energy shift to the branches and stem, well on the way to gracing your year with decades or more of shade, beauty, and habitat.

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The Pendleton Tree Commission is appointed by the City Council and assists in guiding the city’s tree management program. This does not include trees on private property, but the committee is providing this information to the public to help keep all of the trees in the city healthy and flourishing.

Swift ban on assault weapons applauded

Toronto Star

There’s an old saying in politics: “Never let a good crisis go to waste.”

It sounds cynical, but it needn’t be. If a genuine crisis is used to accomplish something that should have been done before, then the public good is being served.

Such was the case on Thursday, March 21 in New Zealand, where just a week after the tragic shooting deaths of 50 Muslim worshippers the government announced a ban on military-style firearms and high-capacity magazines.

It’s believed the perpetrator used weapons of that kind to wreak so much deadly havoc in such a short period of time.

But you don’t have to know exactly what kind of arms were used to devastate the mosques in Christchurch to know that no civilian needs to possess military-grade assault rifles designed specifically to maximize an attacker’s death toll.

The New Zealand ban will apply also to accessories used to convert other firearms into high-capacity military style weapons. But it won’t apply to most rifles and shotguns used by hunters and farmers in the largely rural country.

This is not about outlawing all guns; it’s about doing away with weapons that have no purpose but to mow down people in large numbers.

That it can be done so quickly in New Zealand while the United States, in particular, fails time after time to ban assault rifles despite dozens of mass shootings highlights differences in both constitutional order and political culture.

New Zealand, like Canada, has no Second Amendment-style “right to bear arms.” A majority government can take swift action if it chooses.

And New Zealand’s public opinion has been outraged by the Christchurch massacre, giving the government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern an opening to act decisively.

It’s to her credit that she has chosen to use the crisis presented by the shooting to get this done while the wounds, both literal and figurative, are still fresh. Failing to act would indeed be a tragic waste.