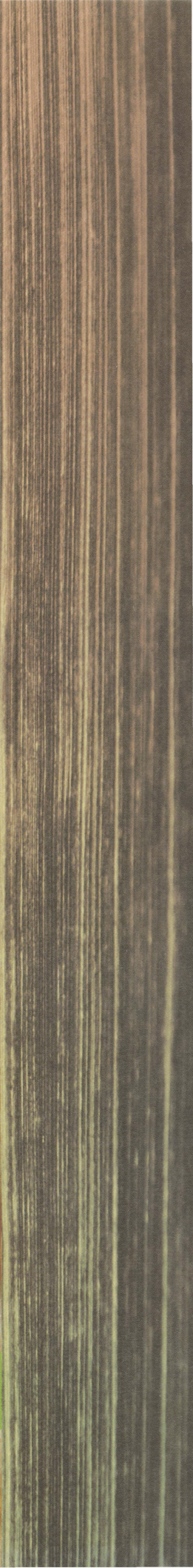


*BARRY ESTABROOK, Author of TOMATOLAND, Visits IDAHO LAND
& Idaho Tomato Hash Served Up Seven Ways.*





Idaho Tomato Hash

A Roundtable of Tomatonian Perspectives

1.

Tomatoland in Idaholand: Barry Estabrook Talks, Events

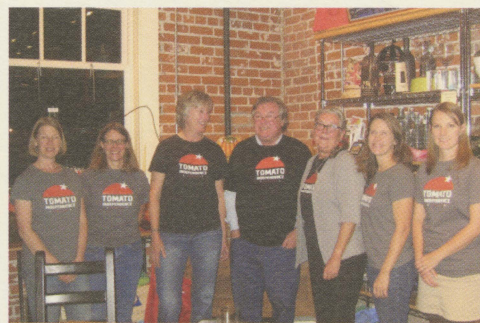
Just as we pulled the last green tomatoes from our soon-to-be-frozen plants, Idaho experienced an infusion of *Tomatoland*, as author Barry Estabrook traversed the state in early October to speak at Boise State and the University of Idaho (where his book is the 2013-2014 Common Read) and to meet with students and food sustainability organizations. Estabrook's 2011 work, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*, is a detailed study of the commercial production of fresh tomatoes, centered in Florida, for the retail, fast food and food service markets. Winner of the 2012 International Association of Culinary Professionals 'Food Matters' Award, *Tomatoland* has broader implications for the challenges and dangers presented by our contemporary industrialized food system.

Estabrook's talks detailed the appalling labor conditions that have prevailed in the industry until quite recently; as well as the myriad toxic herbicides, pesticides and fungicides that are used in the production of tasteless commercial tomatoes. More recently, the organization of agricultural labor in Florida and related campus-based activism have resulted in somewhat improved conditions, as workers are paid a bit more for their work, and are better protected by policies that foster safe and humane working conditions. Estabrook reported that major fast food chain buyers (including Taco Bell, McDonalds, and Burger King, though apparently not Wendy's) responded to consumer pressure in pledging to purchase only those tomatoes grown in accordance with the more progressive standards. Most major supermarket

chains have not signed on to the pledge, despite mounting consumer consciousness of food sustainability issues.

The engaging and genial Mr. Estabrook blogs at www.politicsoftheplate.com. He also recommended the Student/Farmworker Alliance (www.sfalliance.org) as an excellent source of information for students who would like to learn more or become involved.

In Southwest Idaho, Estabrook's talk was the culmination of a series of programs called the Tomato Independence Project, sponsored by the Treasure Valley Food Coalition. The initiative was intended to encourage home gardeners, local business owners, and anyone with access to a pile of dirt to grow their own tomatoes. A lively and creative slate of events included seed-starting and seed-saving workshops, heirloom tomato tastings, homemade bloody mary and tomato juice with beer fiestas, readings groups, impromptu lectures, storytelling and more. Next year, tomato preservation techniques are on the agenda. —SB



Barry Estabrook, center, with members of the Treasure Valley Food Coalition / Tomato Independence Project

2.

Spanish Eyes / Idaho Tomatoes

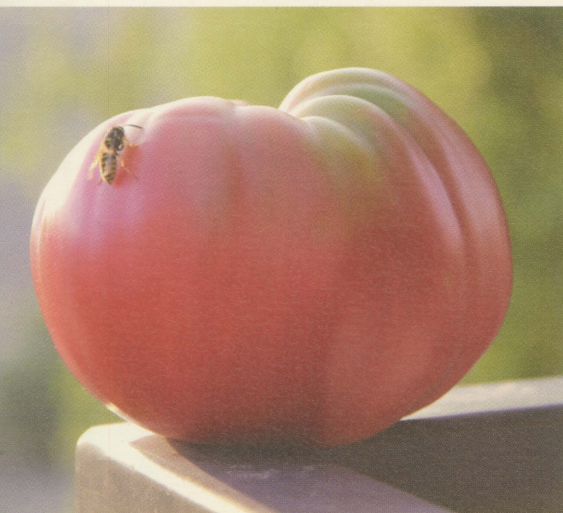
When a Spaniard moves from his home country, one of the most difficult things he must accept is that he shall never be able to find his beloved tomato with such ease and for such a fair price again. The Spanish are among the highest producers and consumers of tomatoes in the world. Their love for the fleshy fruit is comparable to the barista's passion for the flawless roast, the wine maker's for the perfect harvest and the Boisean's for the exceptional microbrew. The Spanish do not just consume their tomatoes, they observe them for their variations in shape and color, they fondle them and take in their smooth texture and earthy aroma and they discuss them with intense pleasure. And once a year they even bathe in them during the Tomatina Festival, when they throw an estimated 150,000 tomatoes at each other for a solid hour. The Spanish know tomatoes.

A friend from Spain moved to Boise last spring. Before he left we discussed his concern about being able to find the kinds of food he was accustomed to. Although it had been seven years since I lived in Boise I assured him he would be able to find fresh, organic and local produce at a handful of great places. I was careful to point out that similarly to Europe, he would have to pay a little more for organic, but he would be able to find quality ingredients. Indeed he was able to locate most of what he was looking for but for a much higher price than I had realized. When I returned to Boise he was eager to show me just how far off I was.

I held a dinner party and my friend arrived with a beautiful tomato and announced that we would be playing a game. Everyone had to guess the tomato's weight and price and the person who was closest would get to take it home. The majority of guests were able to estimate its weight of 1.18 pounds but no one came close to the price. At \$5.29 a pound, the winner took home a \$6.24 tomato which, at the time, was what it cost for five pounds of tomatoes at a Boise supermarket. Although this was on the extreme side, as a Spaniard, my friend assured me that he had yet to find a tomato of quality and price in Boise that he can find elsewhere.

Estabrook's *Tomatoland* shows us the true cost of putting a tasteless, contaminated tomato on the table, and my friend showed me the out of pocket price for doing the socially responsible thing. As we discussed this conundrum into the evening there seemed only one real solution, and that was to grow our own. While this approach is viable for me, I hope it doesn't remain the only answer for the future. Personally, I would like to see the day when exceptional produce is no longer a niche market and it comes in such abundance that we get to use the excess for an enormous food fight.

—Kelli Parker



The Idaho Tomato in Question

Photo courtesy of Kelli Parker

3.

Wild Cold Wilderness Tomato Gardening

First I want to say that I am by no means an expert gardener or anywhere near one. My mom grew up on a rural farm in North Dakota and wherever we lived, planted a garden for fresh veggies and canning. As a kid raised mainly in Idaho, I grumbled with garden chores until I grew up and had my own. I figure I didn't have a prayer with farming in my blood.

I now live in Bozeman, Montana, which is primarily zone 4, 4,500 feet above sea level; but also spent eight years at a cabin outside Bozeman at 5,500 feet above sea level and solidly a zone 3. The cabin was surrounded by forest service land and gardening was a constant trial.

From marmots, bears, rabbits, elk and deer grazing to the mid-July cool night zap, I found lettuces and spinach were my best producers. I always kept my tomatoes in pots to move indoors when



nights might be too cool, but even found keeping them on the porch (6 feet off the ground) would still not prevent the deer and bears from walking right up the front steps and munching my potted tomatoes before they were ripe. In eight years, I can't remember a ripe tomato being plucked from the vine, so it's a bit surprising that I kept trying, now that I think about it. (I think I mostly yanked up the vine and placed them in the basement, and had a few ripen after the frost.)

Now we live in town. I still plant tomatoes in pots. In May, I start the season by purchasing smaller fruit varieties; the larger the plant the better. I choose selections with shorter production times so that I will have fruit in late July or August. I am always looking for new varieties, and prefer heirloom and organic but am not opposed to hybrids like high-yielding Sweet 100 and Chocolate Cherry, my family's new favorites. I no longer mess with "walls of water," but rather wait to purchase and plant until after the snow leaves Sacajawea Peak, which is typically after Memorial Day. (An older farm lady with a fabulous garden uses this rule of thumb.) I use organic compost and place the pots along the south-facing fence. My friend had much larger plants and a higher yield by placing plants along a south-facing wall and keeping a dripper hose at the base.

With middle-school age kids and summer traveling, my gardening and tomatoes have taken a backseat to an active life. My raised beds are grown with a Darwinian approach, and each year I revise my selections to reflect the successes and failures of the previous year's harvest. The range of kale has made the top of the list and grows beautifully here.

—Dana Mitchell

"Plants are so unlike people that it's very difficult for us to appreciate fully their complexity and sophistication. Yet plants have been evolving much, much longer than we have, have been inventing new strategies for survival and perfecting their designs for so long that to say one of us is the more 'advanced' really depends on how you define that term, on what 'advances' you value."

—Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*

4.

Tomatoes in the Historical Lurch

It is widely known that tomatoes, a new world crop, were regarded with suspicion and superstition when they were introduced into Northern European cuisine in the sixteenth century. Today the tomato is so ubiquitous in globalized cuisine that it is hard to imagine cooking without it. A report from the long transitional interval between these two milestones of tomatohood may be found in the pages of *The Boston Cookbook*, the revised edition of which was published in 1900 by Mary J. Lincoln (no relation.) Quoth Mrs. Lincoln, "The vegetable kingdom is the original source, of all organic matter. All our food is derived directly from the vegetable world, or indirectly through animals which have been nourished on vegetable products. The ox and the sheep, which are consumed in the form of beef and mutton, have not fed on flesh, but on grass, hay, oats and other grains."

Most readers will concede this point. But skepticism may well greet what follows: "Food, in the form in which it is eaten, cannot sustain life. It must be converted into a fluid that can pass through very small channels into the blood. Then it must be mixed with the air, and undergo certain changes, before it can replace the worn-out elements of the body. To prepare food so that it can most readily be assimilated, that is, made like our bodies, should be the chief purpose in cooking." If taken too literally, this advice would surely lead to culinary disaster. Let the reader note how judiciously the principle is applied in the following "receipts" from Mrs. Lincoln's book.

Raw Tomatoes.—Scald and peel at least an hour before using. Keep them on the ice, and serve with sugar, salt, vinegar, or with Mayonnaise dressing. If very large, they may be sliced before serving.

Tomato Catchup. (Mrs. Campbell.)

Boil one bushel of ripe tomatoes, skins and all, and when soft strain through a colander to remove skins only. Mix one cup of salt, two pounds of brown sugar, half an ounce of cayenne pepper, three ounces each of ground allspice, mace, and celery seed, two ounces of ground cinnamon, and stir into the tomato. Add two quarts of best cider vinegar, and when thoroughly mixed strain through a sieve. Pour all that runs through into a large kettle, and boil slowly until reduced one half. It is an improvement to add a pint of brandy ten minutes before the catchup is done, but many think it unnecessary.

Elsewhere, Mrs. Lincoln provides "Hints on Diet for Invalids," including the following: "Tomatoes as an article of diet are considered by many physicians a remedy for dyspepsia and indigestion." Except, perhaps, in those rare cases where dyspepsia is induced by brandy-laced Catchup.

—Vijay Edmunds



5.
Pointless Tomatoes

I am not a gardener and I never liked tomatoes. Growing up in a city very unlike Boise—mostly paved, not a lot of green, even in the parks—meant that I didn't have a lot of exposure to "nature" when I was young. I went on my first hike in college and didn't try my hand at gardening until my husband and I bought our first house, in Boise in 2005. It was only when friends in Idaho shared the fruit of their gardens in the form of perfectly red, ripe, summer tomatoes that I got my first taste of the real thing. Starting with lots of salt, pepper, and fresh basil I began to make my way past my previously strong aversion to the tomato's goeey and squishy interior, congratulating myself for appreciating the new taste sensation available to my more sophisticated palate.

As a new homeowner I soon learned that "gardening" really meant yard work. Lots and lots

of raking and weeding. Where were the blissful, sun drenched afternoons filled with colorful flowers and ripe vegetables I'd come to expect from the pictures on the internet?! After a few years of yard work I decided to take the next step and planted a small cherry tomato plant one summer. It died a few weeks later due to complete neglect (I had planted it when I was 8 months pregnant and hadn't realized that the demands of a newborn might put watering the tomato plant lower down on my daily to-do list.)

This past summer I entered into another relationship with a tomato plant, somewhat against my will. My mother-in-law was staying with us for a few weeks to help out when I had an unexpected illness. After many questions about its placement (which I feebly waved off with a mumbled "yes, there is fine,") she and my now four-year-old son excitedly planted a tomato seedling in the back yard. I later saw this tomato plant as an interloper, completely out of place in the carefully curated (survival of the fittest), xeriscaped (under-watered) patch of yard I considered to be "the garden." But this time I watered, and watered, and overwatered, and regular watered, until, to my great surprise, two tomatoes appeared and started to ripen. Over the next weeks and months my physical activity was often limited to sitting and staring at these two tomatoes, wondering things like, what is the point of this plant? All this effort for two tomatoes? Well, yes, that was enough—plenty, in fact—for this reluctant gardener. I shared the small harvest with friends during a recent weekend away when they forgot some of their salad vegetables. My two tomatoes merged with others scrounged up from around the kitchen, and we all agreed that it was lucky I had brought along those "pointless" tomatoes.

—Janice Neri

6.

Costoluto Genovese, Tomato for the Climate Change Apocalypse

My foremost friend among local food activists recently related that many Idaho gardeners and farmers had a particularly difficult year for growing tomatoes in 2013. She had formulated a plan to gather feedback from gardeners on which varieties yielded well under adverse weather conditions. I was speaking Italian before the question was fully out of her mouth, because there is one tomato variety that has been the excelsior of productivity and adaptability, in every one of the 15 or more seasons in which I've grown it, and that is the beautiful Costoluto Genovese. It starts bearing early, persists until late in the year, asks for little water and no fussing, and never fails to give generously. Its name means "ribbed tomato of Genoa," but doesn't it sound better in Italian?

Ribbing is indeed a notable feature of the tomato, which some also describe as pleated or cat-faced. Perhaps because of this unfamiliar quality, or its intriguing variability in size and shape, it is not so well-known as it merits, and can be a little hard to find. But the seed is currently carried by Territorial Seeds, which advertises it as an "oddy-shaped tomato," and Totally Tomatoes, which describes it somewhat generically as "an excellent performer," as well as Park Seeds, which identifies it as an Italian heirloom from the early 19th century.—SB



Many tomatoes are described as "multifaceted." But *Costoluto Genovese* actually allows you to count the facets.



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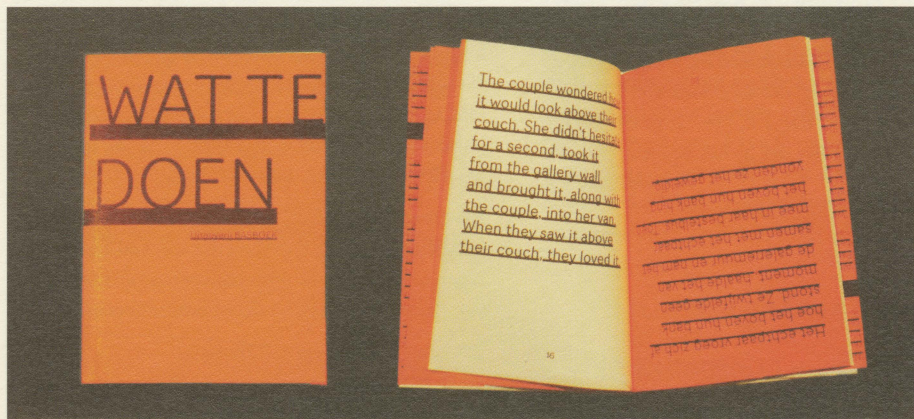
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**Book, construed to include
all forms of written language.*



paper blog

Idaho Booker's Dozen 2013 Updates: The latest edition of **Booker's Dozen** continues to tour the state, and continues to be met with surprise, enthusiasm, and newfound interest in the making of books. One of the books featured in the exhibit, *What to Do/Wat te Doen* by Bas Fontein of the Netherlands (pictured at left) was just announced as the co-winner of the Jury Prize in the prestigious 4th Sheffield International Artist's Book Prize, awarded by the Open College of the Arts in the United Kingdom.

Idaho Booker's Dozen 2013 will appear at the Coeur D'Alene Public Library in November. It will then make a brief stop in Boise in December, where it may be viewed in the context of a gala reception hosted by the Osher Institute, at the Arts and Humanities Institute Gallery, located in Boise State's Yanke Center, 220 East Parkcenter Blvd. The reception will be held the evening of December 5, 5:30 - 7:30 pm. For more information, IdahoCenterfortheBook@boisestate.edu.

In January 2014, **Idaho Booker's Dozen** will open at the David O. McKay Library, Brigham Young University Idaho.

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