

1980?

About your birthday present:

To begin with, I had too much yard. Obviously, I couldn't even consider having it all as grass; it would be far too much to mow. So I started a garden.

I did everything wrong. It was the wrong time of the year to plant; the soil was solid rock; the drainage was bad; and I didn't know the first thing about gardening. In California the tomatoes grew wild. I liked that. I'd got used to having homegrown tomatoes. I didn't know that it was so difficult to grow them.

But I tried anyway. Good dirt was imported from the hinterlands. Then a generous helping of peat moss and bark mulch and it looked presentable. By the time that was done, it was much too late to plant anything.

But I did anyway.

And things grew. Sort of.

It was the hottest and driest summer on record. My plants and I labored thru the worst of it. I apologized for planting them so late that they didn't have a fair chance. I watered them often. They survived.

I read a few books. I was still doing everything wrong. I added more mulch. I remade the rows. I picked the leaves from the bottom of the tomato plants. (I should have done it sooner.) I started watering correctly.

It all helped some.

Linda went to a lecture. She came back and told me that I'd planted too close together, and that I might as well pull up the plants that weren't bearing and wait till next year. I had to agree.

So, about a month ago I dedicated a hot Sunday afternoon to the task of chopping down the great experiment. I pulled up about half the plants, leaving only those that actually had some tomatoes growing on them. Those, I staked up again.

One particular plant was so puny that I hadn't expected it to last at all. I had given it the poorest spot, saving the best for the healthier looking specimens. But as I started to pull it up, I noticed that it had the beginnings of a tomato, so I left it.

I took one of the cages from the plants I'd pulled up and put it around the tiny plant. Then I remade the hill it was in and put a lot more mulch around the roots. I gave it a good drink and, for good measure, a bit of fertilizer. (Organic, of course.)

Well, she thrived. Freed from the shade of her larger, but no more fruitful sisters, she began to grow, long after the season was supposedly over. She still had only the single fruit, but what a fruit! Though still small, she concentrated all her energies into that single tomato, until it was the pride of my garden. It was easily the largest, and perfectly formed.

So, I thought, "What a perfect birthday present for Mamaw!" This perfect tomato, organically grown, pesticide free, a product of only sun and soil and water and love; a glorious culmination of an extra long season.

Of course, it didn't work. Things like that never do, or so it seems.

Here it is, time for your birthday, and the perfect fruit, instead of being red and ripe and luscious is hard and green and not nearly ready to be picked. With the stubborn tenacity she demonstrated thru the long hot summer, my special plant now refuses to surrender her only offspring.

Linda had me covered as usual. She found a great little pocket mirror with a light on it. Just the thing for a little touch up at the opera. It even has a magnifying mirror, so you won't have to use your glasses. Really a nice, useful present. Much more practical than a tomato, no matter how beautiful.

So now, when you use the mirror, you can think of us. And when we eat the tomato, we'll think of you.

Happy Birthday, with love,

Jim and
Linda and
Charles and
Claire.

Jim Linda Charles Claire

Also - a wonderful electric car opener which I
desperately needed -

Well, she thrived. Freed from the shade of her
larger, but no more fruitful sisters, she began to grow
long after the season was supposedly over. She still had
only one single fruit, but what a fruit! Though still
small, she concentrated all her energies into that
single tomato, until it was the pride of my garden.
Was really the largest, and perfectly formed.

So, I thought, "What a perfect birthday present for
Hansel! This perfect tomato, organically grown,
pesticide free, a product of only sun and soil and water
and love; a glorious culmination of an extra long
season."

Of course, it didn't work. Things like that never
do, or so it seems.

There it is, time for your birthday, and the tomato
is still green and not nearly ready to be picked. With
the stubborn persistence and determination that the long hot
summer, my special gift has refused to surrender her
single tomato.

Linda had me covered as usual. She found a great
little pocket mirror with a light and a little shiny
for a little touch up on the cheek. My eyes has a
miraculous mirror, so you won't have to use your
eyes. Really a nice, useful present. Much more
practical than a tomato, no matter how beautiful.

So now, when you use the mirror, you can think of
us. And when we eat the tomato, we'll think of you.

Happy Birthday, with love,

Jim and
Linda and
Charles and
Claire.

The Charles Charles Charles

When a woman...
a perfect present