

Tomato season is just coming here in our garden. We are always a bit later than average. Our particular spot is colder than the area around us, and our warm weather crops take a little longer to mature than in other gardens in our locality. But, we wait stoically--or, sometimes, not so patiently, for those red fruits we hold in such high esteem.

We are getting enough ripe tomatoes now to supply every meal with their juicy, red goodness, but not enough yet to make sauce, canned tomatoes, and juice. Looking at the ripening fruits in the garden, though, I can see that there will soon be enough to cook into those products we "put up" for winter use.

A few weeks ago, when I noticed the first tomatoes beginning to change color, I remarked that when we had ripe fruits, I was going to eat buttered toast with tomato slices every morning for breakfast. Mostly, I have done just that. I can't think of any way that better accentuates the flavor of vine-ripened tomatoes than a little salt sprinkled on the slices that top homemade whole grain bread that has been toasted and spread with salty home churned butter.

Unless--of course, it is a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich. When we froze the packets of bacon from last fall's pigs, I made sure to save some for this summer's tomato season. Slices of that smoky bacon with leaf lettuce from the garden and the red tomatoes--sandwiched between two pieces of that same homemade brown bread--that's a lunch we don't mind having several times during late summer.

Someone will say--what about the mayonnaise? I must admit that no kind of mayonnaise or creamy salad dressing ever finds a place in our refrigerator. I abhor the taste and consistency, and Runo doesn't care if he has it or not, so it is a "banned substance" here. Just like peanut butter--something that Runo dislikes intensely, and I don't like well enough to buy or use just for myself.

Now, though, with tomatoes ripening faster than we can eat them, it will soon be time to bring out the big kettle and make sauce. We use a lot of jars of tomato sauces of different kinds during the winter, and I want those that we make from our own tomatoes, onions, garlic, and herbs. During the winter, the taste of "home" is evident in every meal.

Eventually, as the summer wanes and the crisp days and nights of fall take over, the tomatoes begin to lose that warm weather flavor. Of course, our desire for that tomato taste wanes as well as the weeks of the tomato harvest pass. So, a plate of sliced, bright red tomatoes on the dinner table may have a slice or two remaining when we have finished eating. And yet, it is with a sense of loss that we eat those last tomatoes. We know that it will be a long time before we see a fresh tomato again. We never purchase tomatoes. We will wait as long as necessary for the homegrown fruits from our own garden. And, in the meantime, our taste for tomatoes will have to be satisfied by canned and frozen sauces, juice, and stewed fruit. We appreciate them as well.