

Green Tomatoes

This was written around harvest time and followed my first attempt at growing produce in grow bags in my back year. I have since got so into gardening that we now have an allotment but it is all still rather hit and miss. It is easy living as we do in an urban environment to take our food and those who produce, transport and sell it for granted. This is a reminder of the skill involved in growing our food but also of our dependence on the earth and our carefully balanced climate.

My tomatoes didn't grow!
I exaggerate,
actually, they grew like wildfire
profuse, gnarled branches
twisting and writhing
roots escaping the carefully selected grow bag
shoots straining my regimental green garden canes
snapping them to pieces
as the unchecked tomato plant grew out of control.
So yes, technically speaking they grew
I fed them strange marmite-smelling
Foul, brown-looking liquid feed
I watered them almost every day
that is, when the Manchester skies didn't rain
but rampant growth gave a false sense that all was well
and I didn't notice that something was wrong
until the first tiny, rather weedy
yellow pointed flowers appeared
sometime in late August
which gave way to tiny hard green fruits
which are now swelling
as the September mornings have a decided nip in the air
as the leaves are exploding into autumn colour.
My father, of course, had the answer straight away
years of listening to Gardener's Question Time on Radio 4
And watching Gardener's World explain the season's tasks
my father's tomatoes are ripe red, ready for harvesting
in fact, I think most have long since been eaten
and he makes it look so simple.
nipping out the little green shoots
in the v-shape formed between the main trusses
so the plant uses its energy to grow fruit
rather than sprouting like a triffyd let loose in the corner of my garden.
So I shall have to hope for a modest size jar
of green tomato chutney,
for to ripen needs the long hot days of unwavering summer
and maybe next year
if I have learned my gardening know how
and watched numerous programmes narrated by Alan Titchmarsh
(does he have to make it look quite so easy?)
I might be able to produce tomatoes that are red,
and good enough to eat straight from the vine.

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