

High Tunnel Tomatoes at Edgewater Farm

Pooh Sprague

Edgewater Farm 99 River Road, Plainfield, NH 03781

602.298.8391 www.edgewaterfarm.com

We are a small diversified farm in the Upper Connecticut Valley. Our marketing strategy incorporates CSA, wholesale and our farmstand. Tomatoes are our single most important vegetable crop to all facets. Historically we started out in the 70's as field growers of tomatoes. Today with the exception of cherry, grape and roma tomatoes, all of our tomatoes are grown in greenhouse environs. We grow 60% in heated tunnels, 40% in the traditional high tunnels....old school. Why?: Extra low budget technology still yields better fruit, less inputs by creating a moderated environment.

Tunnels: Ledgewood Farm 21x96 with 5' sides. No electricity available so poly gets rolled down in season and collected in a bundle at the peak in the off season. Poly gal gable end coverings a recent upgrade for increased light transmission. 5 Row system, nominally spaced 14-16 " in single row. Double drip lines for each row, irrigated by pond water that is tested annually for e coli. Trellising is single poly strand tied off at the purlins for each plant. Somewhat spacious, but helps with air movement in July and August in a passive environment without HAF.

Soil: Agawam sandy loam. SME tested annually. Organic amendments use for fertility. Peanut or feather meal, sulfate of potash, a little bone char for P plus compost amendment in spring because of off season leaching of fall and winter rains and snows.

Plants: All grafted plants, as we are in our 8th year with the newest of the houses. Mix of heirlooms, romas and beefsteak, Geronimo is now our backbone, Trust and Abrason. All grafted on Maxifort rootstock. Tried Emperador from JSS, will continue to experiment with them.

Culture: Planting seeds late February and early march for early may planting. Plants will be 8-10" ideally and well rooted in 4.5" pot. Beds are made with a rotary plow so they can be 6-8" high, covered with biotelo. Plants are set in with no started charge. Frost protection is supplied by a propane pot burner. Fruiting begins early-mid July depending on weather, and sunlight. Culturally we sucker and clip, but only partially successful in truss pruning and putting in truss supports. Usually spray once for hornworm, but 2009 late blight has us now keep a battery or fungicides from different frac groups on hand. Fulvia has been an occasional problem, we hope for some low humidity breezes and steer away from varieties that are prone to it ,like Big Beef and Massada. We do not lower vines, but let them drape and use the "older" houses for #2 fruit and canners. We harvest all #1 into 17 lb single level nesting poly trays. Usually harvest 5- 6 good trusses of fruit depending on variety before plants are topped or begin draping, fruit quality diminishes beyond that.

Summary: High tunnels, in their elementary form have certain advantages over more sophisticated capital intensive tomato growing systems. At our farm we like simple. A simple system gives you the biggest bang for your buck. Simpletons can fix simple systems. When the flood hits, it's a much simpler fix.