

TOMATO: KNOW SOW GROW FEAST
LAUNCH SPEECH BY
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ROYAL TASMANIAN BOTANICAL GARDENS
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Thank you very much for inviting me to launch this fabulous book *Tomato: Know Sow Grow Feast* by Penny Woodward, Janice Sutton and Karen Sutherland. And there can be no better or more appropriate setting to do so than here in the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens.

As Governor – whose job it is to know everything – I should point out straight away that there is a pre-existing local publication called *Tomato production and culture in Tasmania*. That, however, was a 29-page booklet published in 1943 by the Government Printer for the then Department of Agriculture. So, here in 2018, this large hardback format, 370-page work of art has little to fear by way of local competition.

Of course, books about gardening and about food are endless and consistently dominate bookshop sales and public library lending statistics. And books about tomatoes and how to use them are many, covering every conceivable topic: history, growing in specific regions, diseases, sundried recipes, paste recipes, tomato growing under glass, hydroponic cultivation, sustainable production, commercial quality management and so on.

There are prosaic titles, from one such as *The Aussie Tomato Book*, to the slightly more flamboyant, like *The Amazing Tomato*. There is even an Arthur Conan Doyle detective novel parody called *The Tomato Sauce Case*.

But the fact of the matter is that this book we are launching today outdoes them all, through the sheer range of its quality content backed up by first class production values. Peter Cundall in his Foreword is quite right to use the term “ultimate” in describing this book.

And as with any decent publication that has a practical function, namely as a recipe book, it sits open very comfortably for the cook.

Now, in respect specifically of the content ... Where to begin? There truly is an enormous amount of accurate detail in this work as the story of a unique fruit; which precedes the recipes, making them all the more enticing when we get to them.

But having said that, the role of the RTBG in the genesis and making of this book is one very worthy starting point, a good degree of which is down to Margot White. For it was Margot who suggested the book to Penny after Penny had consulted her for information about the heirloom tomato scene in Australia, Margot being responsible for supervising the growing of heritage tomato seedlings for the RTBG's annual tomato plant sale and that exercise has, to quote the book, 'massively expanded the number of heirloom tomatoes available to gardeners in Tasmania'.ⁱ – So I think we all would warmly acknowledge Margot White.

So ... Where to begin? There are facts derived from experience, which will prove to be valuable for urban backyard gardeners especially, as this example shows, and I quote – and these are Karen's words:

"Growing tomatoes in my younger years, I made a mistake that is common to many new gardeners – I assumed that more plants equalled more fruits. After exploring jungles of tangled leaves and discovering few fruits, I compared notes with vegetable-growing friends and found that, for some vegetables, more is less. There are vegetables that cope well with crowding, which is a common approach in modern urban gardening, but tomatoes are not one of them. Cherry tomatoes deal better with competition from other plants, but planting many cherry tomatoes close together will not lead to more fruits – it will usually result in more pests and diseases thanks to reduced airflow and increased hiding places for bugs."ⁱⁱ

So that's a concise quote from Karen, yet with no less than ten facts making up its contextual base. Can co-authors Penny and Janice up the ante?

Mhm, let's see. How about this, then, from Penny:

"Tomatoes typically comprise 94.5 per cent water, 3.9 per cent carbohydrates (made up mostly of 2.6 per cent sugars and 1.2 per cent fibre, although sugars can vary quite a bit depending on the variety), 0.9 per cent protein and 0.2 per cent fat. The balance is tiny amounts of vitamins, minerals, amino acids and more. A 100g serving of tomatoes contains about 75kj [*kilojoules?*] of energy, so they are very low in calories."ⁱⁱⁱ

End of quote. That is equal parts chemistry lesson and culinary advice and the kind of knowledge I find completely fascinating. Penny continues to tell us about the health benefits of lycopene, which gives tomatoes their redness, a nutrient which we learn is productive against prostate cancer and cardio-vascular disease; and with my brain on the alert for tomato facts, I have read which suggests it is also linked with sperm quality.^{iv}

It now remains for Janice to somehow equal, if not exceed, the wisdom and practicality of her co-authors. Of course, like all true lovers of gardening and vegetable production, our authors of this lovely book are in no way in any form of competition, quite the opposite, yet we have to admit that – just like the phrase the proof is in the eating – it is the case that Karen and Penny lay a sort of groundwork for Janice, from whom here is but one mouth-watering example:

“Tomato and Saffron Risotto with Mussels ... A tomato book without a tomato risotto would be a gastronomic sin! Sam [Pinkard, Launceston’s Geronimo Aperitivo Bar & Restaurant] has elevated the humble risotto to another luxurious level with the addition of saffron and plump, juicy mussels freshly plucked from arguably the cleanest waters in the world. [Ingredients:] 8 red heirloom tomatoes; 2 large brown onions; 100 millilitres olive oil; 6 garlic cloves; 200 grams carnaroli or Arborio rice; 100 millilitres white wine; 700 millilitres hot fish stock; 5 strands of saffron; 500 grams fresh live mussels debearded; ½ bunch fresh parsley; 4 lemon wedges.”^v

I won’t go into the recipe – I suggest you buy the book for that – suffice it to say that blanching the heirloom tomatoes initiate the process.

I have learnt so much from this book, not the least about storing tomatoes (NOT in the fridge!) and many things that will be valuable when I resume a life which includes gardening and cooking.

And so on that note, congratulations again to the authors, Penny Woodward, Janice Sutton and Karen Sutherland, photographers and other contributors who have succeeded in creating this handsome and thoroughly engaging and rewarding publication, *Tomato: Know Sow Grow Feast* which I hereby officially declare launched.

Thank you.

ⁱ Page 112-3.

ⁱⁱ Page 31

ⁱⁱⁱ Page 126.

^{iv} The Mercury, 12th September 2018, p 13.

^v Page 274.