

Tomato Man Shares Gardening Tips

The "Tomato Man", also known as Joe Cluts, learned early on that when it comes to growing great tomatoes, sometimes it doesn't hurt to depart from what the "experts" say. More than 200 tomato plants and a myriad of other vegetables fill his raised 4-ft. wide beds that run the full length of his 50 by 150-ft. garden.

Years ago, when Cluts followed his extension agent's recommendation to add 1/2-in. organic material to his heavy clay soil it didn't help at all. Cluts decided to take extreme measures. He brought in 100 tons of sand and 100 tons of manure - enough to cover his garden 3 ft. deep. The sand trucker thought he was crazy, and Cluts admits, the soil wasn't great the first couple of years, but it's gotten better every year since. He re-generates it each year with 2 in. of an organic sawdust/horse manure mix that fertilizes, holds moisture and mulches so well that Cluts doesn't have to weed. The raised beds also dry faster in the spring for earlier planting. When he needs to water the beds, Cluts irrigates from a pond.

"Virtually all I have to do is plant and harvest," he says. To prevent disease, Cluts plants tomato plants 2 ft. apart in cages he makes out of sturdy, concrete reinforcing wire. He uses the same wire around the garden's perimeter to keep out wildlife.

Each year Cluts starts 1,800 tomato plants (97 varieties) in 10-oz. Styrofoam cups in late winter. The cups are cheap and give the plant

more space to produce healthy roots. Each cup is numbered according to the tomato variety it contains and becomes a garden marker once the plants are transplanted.

The seedlings are grown in a lean-to greenhouse next to his house. Cluts uses vents and fans to transfer heat between the greenhouse and house when he starts the plants in March. He also has electric heaters and a backup propane heater.

"Use a soil-less mix, not compost," Cluts says. "You want it sterilized without fertilizer." The pots should be on 75-80 degree surfaces or heating pads with a plastic dome or something on top to hold moisture. Once plants are 1/2-in. tall, they should be placed in a cooler location so they don't grow long and leggy. He also likes to harden off plants in the high 30's and low 40's, which makes them hardier and bear fruit earlier.

Cluts sells all but about 200 of his plants. He also sells the 1/2 to 1-bushel of fruit each plant bears at a stand in his front yard. He encourages people to taste different varieties and try some of the old heirloom favorites. Some varieties such as Brandywine are over-rated, in his estimation.

"My favorite is Hillbilly," Cluts says. "It's very large at 16 to 32 oz. and multicolored - yellow, orange, red. It's not the prettiest but it's the best tasting."

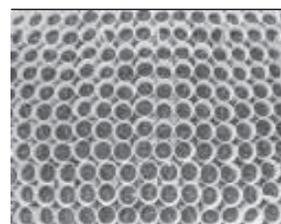
He grows tomatoes in all colors - red, yellow, orange, green and white, purple, and chocolate brown - and has plenty of entries



More than 200 tomato plants and other vegetables fill Joe Cluts's raised 4-ft. wide beds that run the full length of his 50 by 150-ft. garden.

for the county fair. The Tomato Man, as customers call him, is a perennial ribbon winner.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Joe Cluts, Tomato Man, 9799 Pekin Rd., Nov-ely, Ohio 44072 (ph 440 338-3091).



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Barn Plaques Make Special Keepsakes

Dorrel Harrison's barn plaques give people who love old barns a way to display and honor them. Made of wood rescued from dilapidated barns, the plaques make a unique wall hanging or mantel decoration. They have special meaning when they are custom handcrafted to resemble a specific barn.

"People have a special attachment to barns. They want something that will evoke fond memories," Harrison says. The retired up-state New York teacher started making the barn plaques two years ago, after moving to Scottsburg, Ind., to be near his son. In New York, Harrison had made covered bridges for wall décor out of barn boards. His son suggested he try barns in Indiana.

"One of my first barn plaques was a Nebraska barn made for Sand Creek Post and Beam Co.," Harrison says. "I have also recently done a wall plaque of Beck's Mill, which is a mill in southern Indiana, which is being restored."

Harrison has created about a dozen different barns measuring about 8 by 10 in. on 15-in. long barn boards. The roof styles vary, and he sometimes adds cupolas, silos and/or

weathervanes. He's done all types of barns including tobacco barns.

"The hardest part is when there is more detail," Harrison says, such as adding artwork on the side of the miniature barns.

Harrison bases his patterns on pictures in books as well as from photos he's taken. Last year he sponsored a Classic Barn Contest in Scott County, Ind. Barn owners had to meet certain guidelines, submit applications and pay a \$2 entry fee. Harrison photographed all the entries, had a committee select the top six and put them on a poster for county residents to vote on. Citizens voted, and Harrison gave the top two winners barn plaque replicas of their barns along with other prizes donated by local businesses. He's holding two more contests this year in neighboring counties.

Along with interesting architecture and history, people who own the barns often have interesting stories. Harrison says.

"I'm hoping to make a brochure and maybe set up a driving tour to attract tourism," Harrison adds.

Barn plaques start at \$69/plus shipping,



Dorrel Harrison's barn plaques are custom handcrafted to resemble a specific barn. They give people who love old barns a way to display and honor them.



Plaques are made of wood rescued from dilapidated barns.

which can cost as much or more than the plaque itself.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Handcrafted Barns/Covered Bridges, Dorrel

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"Slide-In" Camper For Utility Trailers

Whenever Art Howlett of Oriskany Falls, New York, wants to go camping he just loads a homemade camper into his utility trailer, hooks it up to his Chevy S-10 pickup, and goes.

"It cost a lot less than a new pop-up camper. And it doubles as a storage shed during the winter," says Howlett.

The trailer measures just 6 ft. 4 in. wide by 10 ft. long, but Howlett says there's actually quite a bit of space inside. "There's room for a full-sized bed, kitchen sink, small refrigerator, and a fold-down dining table."

The camper was built with 3/8-in. thick plywood at both ends and cedar log siding on both sides. The floor consists of 2 by 6's with plywood on top. The roof is made from

corrugated metal. There's a single door on the back end and a window on the front and also on one side. Inside are three electrical outlets and a switch for an overhead light.

The camper weighs about 700 lbs.

"I call it my redneck camper," says Howlett. "I came up with the idea when I retired and thought I would do a little camping. Recently I took it to a local state park, and you wouldn't believe how many people stopped by and wanted to look inside. My wife said the next time we go camping she's going to take a guest book."

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Art Howlett built this low-cost camper to slide into his utility trailer.