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Fresh off the vine

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Posted: Tuesday, August 3, 2010 12:00 am |

By Kristi Waterworth
Marshfield Mail
correspondent | 0 comments

There are days when I miss my great-grandfather. He died when I was 13, but he still runs through my memories. I remember him in those white and blue, vertically striped overalls, his deeply wrinkled face shaded by his MFA cap. When I think of farmers, I think of him – driving that black Ford pickup with his name neatly lettered on the door in gold paint.

I met J.C. Young last week, and, for the first time in a long time, I saw my great-grandfather again. J.C. is a retired farmer who spends his days in his "small" 30-foot by 40-foot garden and his "other" 80-foot by 90-foot garden. He invents, he improvises and he grows amazing produce, among other things.

Fresh off the vine

Farmer J.C. Young shows off some tomatoes he picked a morning last week. These whoppers aren't unusual at all.

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J.C. lives on the farm his parents bought for \$275 in 1944. His mobile home is modern, but he says it's parked in the old tomato patch. His parents had a tomato cannery and grew tomatoes in the same soil J.C. does. And J.C. grows some whoppers.

He came to the attention of the Marshfield Mail when he brought in a couple of four-pounders. The day I visited, he showed me tomatoes bigger than softballs. These weren't just a few anomalies, they were frequent occurrences all over the farm.

J.C. says he doesn't do anything special, just waters them and dresses with fertilizer from his various farm animals – and they grow to colossal sizes. Four years ago, he had a tomato vine that was 14 feet tall. So far this year, they've only reached about 8 foot.

He grows a massive amount of produce and then gives much of it away ... to people in nursing homes, to friends, to strangers. He set me up nicely, and my household was grateful for the beautiful tomatoes, beans, peppers and cucumbers that flowed freely from J.C.'s garden.

J.C. tells me that he's also growing some whopper pumpkins. He let me sneak a peek, but I admit that the sheer size of these pumpkins is lost on me. We've never grown those whoppers. J.C. saved the seeds from last year's plants (and years and years and years before) and has slowly selected for bigger fruits and hardier plants.

Like in any good husbandry, he's selecting for the very best. For the last 40 years, J.C. has kept a garden, and I'd bet he's got plenty of years left in him.

His little tomato hobby has grown into something quite

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amazing. my great-grandfather would be proud.

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