

Highlands Inn), John Chadwell (general manager for The Inn at Spanish Bay and The Lodge at Pebble Beach), Tony Tollner (co-owner of Rio Grill in Carmel, Tarpy's Roadhouse in Monterey and Montrio), Shelly Schachter (gardening columnist and chef/owner of the former Shelly's Kitchen in Carmel Valley), Jim Gallivan (food and beverage director of the Doubletree in Monterey) and more—this is no ordinary potluck. The dishes not only are stunning to look at (particularly Shelly Schachter's gorgeous Fantastic and Golden Boy Tomato Tart) but they are full of surprises, all of them pleasurable. Dishes included a Savory Clafouti of Tomatoes and Roasted Corn; Tomato Fennel Bake; Yellow Tomato and Papaya Salsa with Saffron- and Chili-Powdered Tortillas; Tomato, Leek and Rye Pie; and Orzo Pasta with Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Chevre and Fresh Herbs. Perhaps the most extraordinary and universally acclaimed offering, was a dessert, also brought by Shelly: two sorbets, one

made with Chello Yellows and one with Early Girl Red tomatoes. Both were light and delightfully refreshing with a nice balance of sweetness and acidity, the rich tomato flavors complemented by the addition of fresh basil.

“There ain't nothing better in life than true love and a home-grown tomato”

This informal gathering has led to some of these flavorful tomato varieties becoming available to the public, according to Gary, as food professionals encourage local farmers to grow them. Myra and Drew Goodman of Earthbound Farms, he says, decided to grow some of the heirlooms they sampled this day and plan to offer them for sale at their produce stand on Carmel Valley Road.

Growing Tips

While the rest of us are putting away holiday decorations and preparing for a mild hibernation after New Year's Eve festivities, Gary can be found early each day at his dining room table planting tomato seeds in six-pack containers. He plants more than 300 seeds in all, knowing that some of them may not germinate and also to have some extra seedlings to give away to friends. Gary orders in December from seed catalogues from companies all over the country.

The six-packs go on heating pads until the seeds germinate and sprout, then Gary puts them under grow-lights (preferable to window sills because the plants tend to get leggy in windows, stretching to reach the light). After about six weeks, Gary replants the seedlings into 4-inch pots. A week or so after “hardening off” the plants, they go into the ground (which he has carefully nourished during the winter with his own compost) usually in mid-to-late April.



Linda Hanna and Mike Stemmler's Brandywine Tomato Tart (top right), Jim Gallivan's Savory Clafouti of Tomatoes and Roasted Corn (center right), and Shelly Schachter's Fantastic and Golden Boy Smoked Salmon Cream Cheese Tart (bottom right)