

Of Raffles, Tomatoes and Scholarships

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What does a tiny tomato plant have to do with a scholarship? It's our scholarship raffles at our monthly Horticultural Society meetings. There is always a surprise waiting there for me. We never know in advance what might turn up on the raffle table. One person's excess might just be the prize I need—or sometimes a call to adventure into a new plant area I might not have previously considered. The element of the unexpected, the surprise win, draws me in. It invites Chance or Fate to play a role in my relationship to green things, and the associated tools and objects of their culture: pots, books, whimsy.

In buying that raffle ticket I open myself up to new choices and kind feelings toward the lonely plants and objects seeking their own meaning and purpose. They have found it on our raffle table! I was not a first winner with tickets I had bought that day, but at the end, when no more numbers were called, and those who had purchased tickets were allowed to go pick up remaining items, I spotted four tomato seedlings; each one in a yogurt cup, waiting for a home. Not the most comely or vigorous, to be sure, but resilient, never the less: a seed that had dared to spring into a seedling, in search of a better life. Of course I had to take them home.

So here was a chance to experiment a bit. I planted one in a large pot, and the other three in various locations in the garden. Two were mediocre, and two grew to exceptional size and beauty. Not only did they give me delicious tomatoes to eat, but even the two which were less productive fulfilled their purpose in engaging my curiosity and teaching me something about the soils and micro growing conditions in my garden. In the larger view, they ultimately supported the education of a future student of horticulture by contributing to the scholarship fund.

The willingness of people to donate raffle table items shows the character of gardeners: frugal, yet generous, conserving, yet sharing, rooted in today with a curious expectation for the future. So, buy a raffle ticket, save a tomato plant, send a student to perpetuate the study of our green world.

