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The Gardener, the Salsa, and a Day at the Ranch

By Rich Showalter

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Once Upon a Time... A Gardener's Daydream
The Gardener, the Salsa, and a Day at the Ranch
Article by Rich Showalter
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This is a tale of a landscape contractor and his quiet getaway in the mountains. Now, I'm no gardener myself, but I swear that this is the true tale as related to me as we relaxed on the front porch on one of those long, summer days spent with a cool one and watching our neighbors mow their lawns.

Rachel Louise Carson authored the book "Silent Spring" alerting mankind (which includes you gardeners and landscapers) to the long term destructive results of certain pesticides and toxic chemicals. From my own personal experience and observation, I wish to add one more insidious ingredient to the expanding list of dangerous substances polluting our gardens. It is called "salsa picante" or "salsa muy caliente" (Hot sauce to you gringos).

Long, one of the favorite lunch choices of many a landscape contractor and gardener, you may want to read on... there is more to that salsa than you've been told.

An obscure legend suggests that the Aztec God of Fire captured the essence of salsa from the bowels of a raging volcano when a high priest prayed for a cure to cleanse the Aztec people of

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plague sweeping the land. The priest placed a single drop of salsa in the food bowl of every inhabitant. The plague vanished from the land and so did the Aztecs!

From personal experience, I know better than to touch the stuff (as you will soon see), but my landscape crew often indulges. I've related this story to them on many a landscape job, but they laugh it off, much like Boy Scouts around the campfire hearing the scary tall tales. Unfortunately, this tale is true...

One Friday night not long ago found us rolling toward the

family diggins in the mountains near Julian, CA. After a hard week of building, planting gardens, and irrigating lawns, I was ready for a relaxing weekend at the ranch... building, planting gardens, and irrigating lawns. After two years the house and surrounding landscaping were nearly half done.

We were almost there when my wife Gerry, the blanket burglar, wanted some Mexican food. She should have married a Mexican chef (or gardener in my case) because her craving for the stuff is almost insatiable.

I said, "No."

She replied, "I will invite mother to spend another month."

I said, "Oh."

"Screeeech."

Poor old Cricket, our midget female drip-dry dachshund, was darn near catapulted through the window by a 90 degree turn into "Pancho's Taco Y Salsa" stand.

Pancho asked me, in broken English, how much hot sauce I wanted for the beef and bean burrito. I told him a half dozen of those little plastic tubs would be fine. They look like miniature "maintenance free" batteries made of the same materials.

The expression on his face can only be compared to a war movie where the pilot of an enemy plane dives out of the sun on the helpless victim. He put on a pair of heavy leather gauntlets, welder's helmet, and reached for a pair of long, steel tongs.

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A lead lined steel box was set in the concrete floor with a radiation alert label on the lid. He reached in with the tongs and removed six tubs; neatly dropping them into my bucket, as I jumped back to avoid flying sparks.

On the way out, I glanced over my shoulder at Pancho who was stenciling a new miniature American Flag on a board hanging from the wall. This guy was an ace many times over, judging from the number of flags that covered the board.

I pointed the old Chevy pick-up for the mountains again with my window rolled all the way down, as Gerry, the masochist, tears streaming from the cherry red eyes, happily munched on her burrito. Cricket had buried herself in a pink asbestos blanket, knowing that a careless spark striking her fur coat could transform her into a crispy critter in a flash.

What happened next was my fault. Normally, after arriving at the ranch, I bury any unused salsa tubs in the open field, six feet under and 100 yards from any living plant or critter. It's the closest thing to a toxic waste dump in these here parts. I should have known better because despite many years as a landscape contractor I have never been able to get a lawn, a tree, or any kind of plant or flower to grow on that spot. I hope the critters who make their home here will forgive me someday.

When I first saw Snuffy and Stumpy together they reminded me of Laurel and Hardy. They are a pair of grey field mice who are roommates sharing the bottom file drawer located in the garden shed. Snuffy was so named because he has hay fever all year long; and Stumpy for obvious reasons - lost his tail in a hunting accident. He was being hunted by Russell the rattler at the time, who misjudged the opening that Stumpy was squeezing through. Old Russ was pretty sore, having broken his nose and fracturing a tooth with nothing to show for it except an inch of Stumpy's fat tail.

After we settled in and before the pick-up was cold, Snuffy, led by Stumpy, made a thorough inspection of the cab looking for tidbits and scraps of food.

Stumpy was the first to spot the eerie pulsating light emanating from the glovebox. Upon inspection, he came across a single tub of salsa that I had forgotten to bury. Being somewhat of a

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selfish glutton, he tore open a corner of the tub and gulped down the whole thing.

Too late, he realized he must have gotten into what the humans call "a stash." Gasping for air, he could not imagine human or beast snorting and shooting this stuff into their bodies. By now, Stumpy was deaf and blind. Little Snuffy took his friend by the whiskers leading him toward the garden shed. With only 25 feet to go, Stumpy gave up the ghost, rolling on his back with his little fat feet pointing toward the moon, that great orb of cheese where he would rest for eternity.

Snuffy dashed for safety when he heard Russell, who had been attracted by all the noise, coming out from under our old riding lawn mower. He rattled to himself with unexpected pleasure as he realized his good fortune. Dessert and settling an old score in one gulp!

Russell would be missed around the ranch. He had just entered his ninth season, helping us to keep the varmit population in check and scaring the wits out of trespassers by hissing and

shaking his tail at them.

Over the years he survived a blizzard of caliber .223, .38, .308, 11 buck, .45, rocks, bottles, bulldozers, lawnmowers, dunebuggies, and dirt bikes, but it was the sauce, disguised in a FAT MOUSE BURRITO, that finally got him! He was the best security snake I ever had.

Elmer, the golden eagle, couldn't believe his good fortune either when he spied Russell from 2,000 feet. They had grown up together, but were mortal enemies knowing that someday one or the other would eventually succumb to fangs or talons.

Elmer was suspicious because by this time of the morning Russell should be resting under a rock or in the wood pile at the back of the garden. Elmer, who fancied himself as a hot shot flyer, cut power and lowered his flaps as he circled above the cold, hard body of Russell who was stretched out stiff and rigid on the lawn, looking like a three foot long rolled taco.

Elmer wasn't as sharp or as aggressive since he lost the territorial dispute with the Sheriff's ASTREA helicopter last spring. Most of his feathers have grown back, but he still has

dizzy spells from time to time. Ah, but that is a story in itself for another time.

Elmer suddenly swooped, throwing caution to the wind, making a fast snatch and grab on the rolled taco that once was a very handsome red Diamondback buzz tail.

Twenty minutes later, while cruising at 5,000 feet, Elmer's eyes began to cross and a fire suddenly erupted in his tail section when he began to feel the full effects of the combination plate lace salsa.

The end came swiftly, as he spun into the lawn near the garden shed. At the last possible second he managed to spread his wings enabling him to crash land near the riding lawn mower. He tore up 30 yards of grass, leaves, and mud before coming to a halt upside down.

The impact saved Elmer's life. The force of it knocked the air, Stumpy, Russell, and salsa right out of him.

When Elmer regained consciousness, he managed to hobble over to the pond, with the aid of a broken tree branch under one wing, to put out the fire in his beak.

Coy, the coyote, at first thought he had seen a meteorite

because he had never seen an eagle up close before. He could eat anything, and often did just to survive, but this bird looked and smelled bad. "Yucka!"

Elmer threatened to brain him with his tree branch crutch if he came one paw closer. Coy decided he wasn't THAT hungry anyway. He did an about face, scratching dirt and grass from the lawn all over Elmer like any sensible animal covering up a mess, before trotting off across the lawn.

Elmer eventually recovered to become a reborn vegetarian and anti-helicopter activist.

Mother nature (aided by my gardening skills) required a full season to purge the lawn and garden of the awful evidence that claimed two critters and nearly a third. Gerry wanted to move the half-completed house to another site, to avoid the large, blackened and charred area of dead ground that was now part of

our front lawn. I stood firm, though. Two years of construction workers tramping back and forth over our landscaping was enough. Besides, the half-life on salsa is fairly short.

Meanwhile, yup, back at the ranch, Snuffy adopted a new roommate, Augie and they moved into the newly completed greenhouse. Gerry insisted that the dead area be covered over and the greenhouse was just the thing to bring life back to that part of the landscape. Augie's sort of a clutze so they compliment each other. Rastus, Russell's cousin, moved into the garden to take over Russell's old job; and Pancho's was closed.

The Fire Chief told Pancho they would let the old stand burn to the ground next time, after putting down the sixth incendiary fire in as many months. On top of that, the insurance company tore up Pancho's policy; and the Environmental Protection Agency launched an investigation. It was too much for Pancho who returned to the land of his ancestors, the Aztecs.

And our house? Well, even though we managed to cover up the damage of the salsa environmental attack with a brand new greenhouse and refurbished lawn (ain't sod great!), the house is still unfinished. Not to worry, though, our ranch is a work in progress that takes me away from the hubbub of my landscape business... so I can get involved in the hubbub of doing the same landscape and construction work for myself that I do for others all week long.

Well, that's the tale. My neighbor is indeed a real landscape contractor with a large grounds maintenance company. I've been to his ranch a few times and can confirm that the place exists

as described, greenhouse, lawn, grounds, unfinished house and all. But as he related this story to me, on that hot, summer day, he had a strange twinkle in his eye. So, is it true? I can't say for sure, but after a chance meeting with Rastus by the riding lawn mower, I'm willing to believe it.

About the Author:

Rich Showalter is a Contributing Writer for ProGardenBiz Magazine, an online magazine for professional gardeners and landscape contractors. Once Upon a Time... A Gardener's

Daydream is a regular feature in ProGardenBiz Magazine. Visit ProGardenBiz to find out how you can get a free subscription, start-up guidance, business ideas and inspiration at <http://www.progardenbiz.com>.

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Blueprints Of Ranch Style Homes – Check Them Out

By Martin Smith

Blueprints of ranch style homes are readily available on the internet and in magazines. The ranch home is the most popular home style in the United States. Ranches can range from a basic oblong shape to a huge L or U shaped luxury ranch. One relatively simple ranch home set of blueprints is a two bedroom, one bath ranch and has a 16 x 24 living room, 14 x 10 dining/kitchen area, one bedroom 12 x 11, and another 12 x 10. There is also a utility room and a porch.

Blueprints of ranch style home that is somewhat bigger has a 19' 8" x 15' 6" great room, 9' 10" x 12' dining room, a 9' 10" x 12' kitchen, a utility room, large master bedroom, with 1 ½ baths, huge closet storage area, and 2 extra bedrooms with a shared bath. This ranch style home also has a 2 car garage, covered porch and a patio off the dining room. The blueprints for this lovely ranch style home have an optional basement plan. Also included in the blueprints is a garage extension if you opt to build the basement.

Ranch homes can be economical to build, are attractive and they can be placed on a narrow lot if set lengthwise. They are ideal candidates for modular or pre fab homes. Ranch blueprints can have lots of amenities like fireplaces, large master suites, decks and porches. Ranch style homes can also be constructed with logs. Ranch houses are ideal for the elderly or handicapped since they're generally one story homes.

Martin Smith can help you. Find out how thousands of people have been helped with the advice and information. Visit this link for details:



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