

## The ultimate BLT

It's a party when you serve it with vine-ripened tomatoes in gazpacho and tomato-corn salad



Bart Hosmer's "Ultimate BLT"  
Lisa Romerein

### The inspiration

"This is our little slice of heaven," say John M. Teixeira and Shelby Mayfield about their Lone Willow Ranch, in California's San Joaquin Valley. Bordered by river and creek, their 48 acres of organic farmland near the town of Firebaugh are planted with more than 300 varieties of tomatoes, as well as dozens of different melons, cucumbers, peppers, eggplant, lettuce, sweet corn, and herbs, not to mention fruit trees. "If there's a variety of something," claims Mayfield, "we like to try and grow it."

Bart Hosmer, executive chef at Bradley Ogden's Parcel 104 restaurant in Santa Clara, California, agrees. For three years he has brought his entire staff out to the ranch, which supplies Parcel 104 with tomatoes and other produce, for what he dubs "the ultimate picnic." It's simple. They pick tomatoes, taste them, and (with no pots or pans) create dishes that aren't just fresh from the field but *made* in the field: [BLTs](#), [gazpacho](#), [tomato-and-corn salad](#) — food that pays homage to tomatoes in all their supremely ripe glory.

What began as an educational field trip has become a much-anticipated annual staff party, complete with [homemade ice cream](#) and impromptu tomato fights. "We get there and just run into the fields," Hosmer says. "It started out being all about the ingredient, but then so much camaraderie came out of it as well. We all really connect over these amazing tomatoes."

When tomatoes are this good, Hosmer insists that they are best eaten raw, with minimal fuss and intervention — a sprinkle of salt, a splash of vinegar. The picnic keeps everything simple, combining the tomatoes with their seasonal brethren: basil, corn, peppers.

The picnic has proven so inspirational for the Parcel 104 staff that last spring Hosmer planted a rooftop garden at the restaurant. "Lone Willow makes me yearn to have a farm," Hosmer explains. Teixeira and Mayfield gave them 18 seedlings to get started.

### Tomatoes with wine

Parcel 104's Master Sommelier, Randall Bertao, likes wines with clean, focused flavors and a medium acidity to balance the tomatoes — such as **Charles Melton Rosé 2004** (Barossa Valley, Australia; \$12) and **Merry Edwards Sauvignon Blanc 2005** (Russian River Valley, CA; \$27).

### Taste for yourself

Lone Willow Ranch tomatoes are available at the farmers' markets in Los Banos and Madera, California. The ranch also hosts the annual "Tomatoes Night Out," a five-course dinner and tomato tasting (Sep 23; nonmembers \$60; 11356 Rd. 5½, Firebaugh, CA; [www.slowfoodmadera.org](http://www.slowfoodmadera.org)).

**The menu:**

Bart's Ultimate BLT

Basil Aioli

Tomato-Corn Salad

Tomato-Cucumber Gazpacho

Easy Dreamy Peachy Ice Cream

**Molly Watson**

**Printed from:**

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