

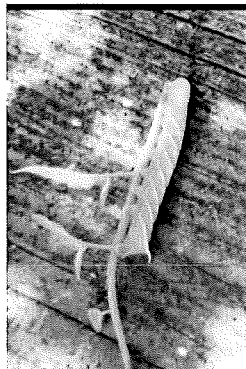
HORNWORM MAFIA

As evening grew near and with great anticipation, I surveyed my sacred space. Usually it was a pleasurable delight to pay homage to my garden. However, this evening, the only honorary degrees I received for my efforts were the degrees of heat from the sweltering sun of the day. Tonight, it felt like 100°!

Water hose gathered, I aimed for the zinnias begging for a drink. The spiderworts drooped and the hibiscus had folded for the day, hours ago. When I drew the hose closer to the cucumber plants, a smile came across my face as I searched for ripe produce playing hide and seek under the umbrella of vines and leaves.

After examining my tomato plant, I recalled past luck trying to grow them in the ground had not proved fruitful. I promised myself, “this year it would be different.” Success assured, I bought a huge pot, potting soil that promised a gainful return, plus a pricey tomato plant from Lowe’s labeled “Big Boy” (Beefy Tomato).

Successfully planted, it looked healthy and produced one ripe tomato. A large green tomato was hanging on the vine just below the one I had picked when my eyes spotted what looked like a giant green bean attached to a leaf. At closer inspection and to my chagrin, it appeared to be a fat, juicy, green worm. From past reading in my Master Gardening Manual, the word “tomato worm” came to mind, but with my limited gardening experience, I had never actually seen one.



Rushing inside, I texted my friend Ali, an avid gardener, for verification and she sent me a picture of its twin and the name hornworm. I shouted to my husband, "I must rid of the worm because it was known to be destructive and I needed the spray bottle that contains, vinegar and water from under the cabinet." His reply was, "I don't like to kill things!" By default, I was stuck with the task of hit man!

At that point, there was no room for guilt in my mind! I was on a mission to save my tomato plant. Armed with the spray bottle, I ran out, pointed at the worm, pulled the trigger and saturated the culprit, but nothing seemed to be happening---so-o, I picked up a twig, gave the worm a poke and suddenly, it seemed to spontaneously explode green slime! I threw it away!

Curious, I grabbed my phone and Googled Hornworm. Turns out it is a caterpillar that turns into a "Sphinx Moth" also known as "Hummingbird Moth" or "Hawk Moth." They are great pollinators but also, make equal prey for other pollinators such as birds, beetles and paper wasps.

My guilt was assuaged, as I continuously checked and watered my tomato plant only to discover some of the "thug's" family had paid on overnight visit and were incognito among what was left of my tomato leaves. Just as I had suspected, it was "The Hornworm Mafia!" After all, I had destroyed their boss! Quickly, I removed the Mob-----of two! Let's just say I relocated them!

Today, I picked my delicious ripe tomato and savored every bite!

