

# Fun With Little Tomatoes

by Walt Fluegel

Photography is fun for me and other camera club members. But fun is defined in different ways. We enter monthly competitions, see friends, learn new techniques, revisit old ideas, and listen to veteran photographers, some of whom we call judges. One of our monthly photo competition topics was SPHERICAL. One can visualize various spheres in ball games, marbles, ball bearings, peas in a pod, fruit, eyes, eggs, seeds, buckshot and cannon balls, as well as our spherical world and spherical bodies out of this world. So for competition purposes it was a matter of selecting an object or image to please oneself first and later a competition judge. I chose the cherry tomato as my sphere to photograph.

## Pre-visualizing

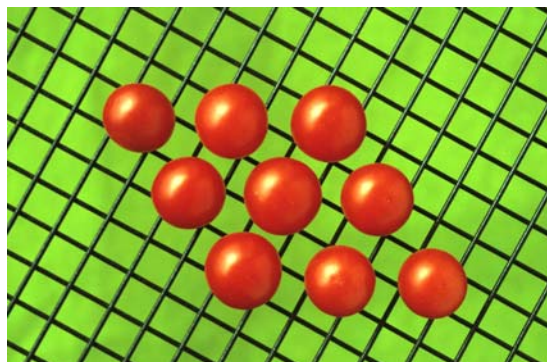
Fruit on the vine? Maybe. I snap a few. Once harvested from the plant everything I do next will be contrived. Nothing natural. Control is in my hands and eyes. I pick some cherry tomatoes and clean off the natural dust patina to a high shine. I dimly realize that variations of size and out-of-roundness may come to haunt me in the final set up stages. Store-bought cherry tomatoes are more uniform in size and shape. I have to consider other things such as backgrounds, diffusion and/or reflective lighting, stem end viewing or flower end viewing and whether snapping a single fruit or an arrangement is best.

I visualized a 3-D pyramid of three on the bottom, two on the next level and one on the top, but I let that thought go. Something told me a diamond shape on a grid had more interest. Later, at judging time, this arrangement provoked one major comment from two different judges.

## The Set Up

I worked indoors by a sunlit window as I find it difficult to use artificial light. Nine fruits were arranged on a large kitchen cooling grid which was suspended about two feet above a green bath towel. Sun that shined on the tomatoes was diffused by using an old parachute cloth, but the sun was allowed to shine directly on the green towel. The red of the tomatoes, the black of the grid and the yellow-green towel made good contrasting colors. I needed a shallow depth of field to focus on the grid and fruit without revealing the texture of the towel.

My Canon F-1 camera was on a tripod and I used Sensia 100 film. For this article I scanned my slide with a Nikon Coolscan V and prepared it in the computer using Photoshop Elements 3.



## Judging

We are looking at cherry tomatoes on a black grid and these tomatoes are in a diamond arrangement with a light yellow-green background. The angled grid puts the diamond arrangement of spheres parallel with the horizontal edge of the slide producing a dynamic aspect to the composition. The photo was judged at the regular monthly competition by one judge, and later at the end of the year banquet by different judge. Both judges are highly regarded for their knowledge and wisdom of photography. Both judges made their comments about composition, exposure and that sort of thing, but I found it amusing that both wanted to alter the photo by starting off with ..... "It might be interesting to ... Move one of the tomatoes off a bit. (I tried that for a slide, I said to myself.) Move one fruit quite a bit. (I tried that too but didn't make a slide.) Or remove one tomato all together. Anything to break the seemingly rigid pattern." (Would you also like it better if one of the tomatoes were green, I said to myself. For which I have a slide but have not presented for competition.)

At this point in the comments I respectfully (hopefully, quietly) disagreed with the judges in a fun way. As we all know, judging is a subjective thing and an image a judge comments on reveals something about that judge. (Do they like order or disorder?) The grid was the formal way of organizing the structure of the diamond design.

I had fun placing the spheres in any pattern allowed by the grid. But I had very little control over the irregular sizes of the home-grown tomatoes. The slight difference in size can be noted when one examines the spacing between the tomatoes. (I could have used uniform-sized marbles instead of tomatoes, but that would be a different challenge.) The open spaces of the grid suggested a square or rectangular pattern but I dismissed that design as not being very interesting. I did not want to repeat the grid, but I did want to use it to my advantage. And that was fun to do! After all I had the fun of picking the grid in the first place. I liked the diamond shape these tomatoes made and removing one tomato from the edge would eliminate the diamond composition. (No fun in that!) Also if one sphere is out of place, believe me, that would drive me crazy. I know it would, because I have a print where one tomato is slightly off alignment. As I look at the print I have the urge to nudge that one sphere back into place.

The year-end competition judge had to make comments on other peoples images too. Before he went on to other winners he presented me with a cherry-tomato-red Honorable Mention ribbon, shook my hand and said, "Congratulations!" (That was fun, he's a nice guy!)

Another part of the fun in a photography club is the discussions and comments other members make after the meeting when some of us go to Perkins for a bite to eat. I paraphrase one person "Gee! And to think he spent so much time on that set of tomatoes when your other photo was a real WOW. And he didn't even pick that one as a winner in any way." As I said in the beginning of this article, there are all kinds of fun in a camera club.