

## Darleen Vigil

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As soon as Darleen Vigil comes home from a hard day's work as a vendor liaison specialist in the Laboratory's Network and Infrastructure Engineering Division, she changes into a pair of shorts, ties her shoulder-length hair into a ponytail and heads into her garden.

"I guess you could really call my garden a small farm," Vigil laughs. "At three or four acres it allows my husband, also a Lab employee, and me to grow all kinds of things along with an annual crop of chiles, and I always have a special place in my heart for our many flowers."

Vigil's chiles, along with the chiles grown by her brothers and sisters, are locally known in Chimayó as "Baca chile" in honor of her late father's side of the family.

"Well-known photographer Don Usner made our Baca chile kind of famous," Vigil says. "It still surprises me to open a magazine or calendar and see my then-six-year-old nephew Delfin Roybal smile at me, holding a basket of the beautiful peppers."

Every year Vigil picks, roasts and freezes a portion of her chile crop while the plants are still green. The remaining chiles are allowed to ripen into a deep red and are used for ground red chile powder and chile ristras.

"Chimayó chiles tend to be smaller and skinnier than Hatch chiles, and they have square shoulders near the stem," Vigil explains. "They also can grow a little more crooked, but their flavor is simply delicious."

## **The kitten in the corn**

Vigil takes pride in her chiles and the community and family traditions they represent, but she is just as proud of the other plants in her care.

"I fall in love with my garden's different colors and textures all over again each season," she notes. "I'm intrigued by each type of plant, from peonies and roses to orchids and mums and from tomatoes and melons to cabbages and cucumbers. My life's passion really is life itself. Life so relentlessly and dynamically offers all the beauty it has and all the challenges it can put forward that there is absolutely no chance of getting bored."

Vigil and one of her brothers were harvesting corn one evening around dusk when they saw a small black-and-white creature hiding among the corn stalks a short distance away. Assuming that the creature was a neighbor's lost kitten, Vigil started to call "Here kitty, kitty" and turned to pet and collect the frightened animal in the growing dark. She stopped herself just in time as the skunk scurried away, luckily without lifting its tail.

"I still get teased a lot about the lost kitten," Vigil recalls with a twinkle in her eyes. "My uncle's wife is taking photography lessons, for example, and she'll occasionally ask me to call her next time I see one of those kittens so she can photograph it."

If Vigil feels a bit under the weather or finds herself worrying about something, she leaves her difficulties behind when she digs her hands into the soil.

"The soil—my family's land—connects me to my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and everyone else who has planted, cultivated and harvested here before me," Vigil says. "I still have visions of my mom lovingly weeding the land as a young woman, creating flower beds that produced the most alluring fragrances one can imagine and helping my dad unfailingly tend to our fruits and vegetables, and this way of life continues."

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Vigil works for the Network and Infrastructure Engineering Division's Telecommunications Services group.

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