



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

TOMATO TALK---Reviewing New Varieties

Kevin Milaeger

The task of selecting tomato varieties for our annual blind taste test is an ongoing process, but around this time of year we have to make the final decision about which tomatoes to include in this year's test. We have 4.5 acres of greenhouses at Milaeger's, but there is a limited amount of space for this project, so we need to narrow down the field. Right now I am surveying the new cherry and grape tomato varieties, and I thought you might like to see some of this year's prospects. I don't think the second week of January is too early to start talking about the spring planting season, do you?

Pretty much every gardener that plants more than a few tomatoes grows at least one small fruited variety. Some gardeners plant them exclusively. I myself am a big fan. I started a few seeds in our greenhouse about two weeks ago. My intent is to grow the plants in the greenhouse and have some fruit by April. I'll let you know how that works out. Here are some highlights for our 2012 trial. All are indeterminate (vine) tomatoes.



Cuban Yellow Grape

'Cuban Yellow Grape' Many of the "yellow" cherry tomatoes are actually gold or orange when ripe---the very popular varieties 'Sun Sugar' and 'Sun Gold' are prime examples. 'CYG' is an heirloom that purports to be pure yellow, and we've been looking for a true yellow cherry tomato to add to our list. The plants get quite large and are reportedly very productive. The fruit is described as sweet and meaty, with few seeds. 'CYG' is "potato leaved," and I can't think of another cherry or grape tomato that has that type of leaf.

Because "potato" leaves are thicker than regular tomato leaves, some tomato enthusiasts believe they are more disease resistant. Come to think of it, cherry and grape tomatoes don't seem to be particularly disease prone. But, our curiosity is piqued, so we'll give it a try.

'Green Envy' Some gardeners are put off by the idea of a tomato that is green when fully ripe, and 'Green Envy' is the darkest green I have seen. Most in the "green" category are really yellow-green. We've been growing a variety called 'Green Grape' for years, but 'Green Envy' seems distinctly different. To my thinking, green tomatoes have a certain zest not found in most red fruited varieties, and it's definitely not found in pink or yellow types. The flavor of 'Green Envy' is described as "tangy, yet sweet." If you make a tomato salad, you might try including a few green tomatoes to add another dimension to the flavor spectrum. A modern hybrid from Burpee.



Green Envy



Christmas Grapes

'Christmas Grapes' Despite its name, I have seen photos of this variety that seem to show a cherry tomato. Maybe the name comes from the fact that the fruit is held in thick clusters, like grapes. This heirloom has red fruits, a little larger than the typical cherry tomato. Sweet, but not so much that it masks the zingy tomato flavor.

I'd like to give it another try since the fruit is so beautiful and because other growers recommend it. This red cherry has a yellow/gold starburst pattern on the blossom end, and the gold color is also found on the inner flesh. It is sweet and flavorful, and reportedly crack resistant.

'Isis Candy' We grew this heirloom some years ago but



Isis Candy



Coyote

'Coyote' My son grew this one a couple of years ago and was not impressed enough to grow it again. Still, I think the number of online fans of 'Coyote' justify giving it a chance in our trial. The mature fruit of 'Coyote' is pale yellow, and the skin seems to be nearly transparent---not unlike an immature gooseberry. It is described as sweet, but with additional complexity. This description is getting dangerously close to that of a "tomato snob." I try to avoid those vague, innocuous terms when writing descriptions. I think one reason for the

popularity of "Coyote" might be its name. It has an edginess that appeals to the rebel in most everyone. An heirloom from Mexico.

'Marcellino Hybrid' This modern hybrid seems particularly promising because it is reputed to be crack resistant----a problem with many small fruited varieties. We hope that the claim is justified. Its flavor is described as evenly balanced, not overly sweet, and it is a heavy producer. The seed supplier claims that the fruit size will be about 1" if the plant is unpruned, but about twice that size if the axils (suckers) are pruned out. I have never heard that pruning affects fruit size---I am anxious to test that claim.



Marcellino Hybrid

These and other trial vegetable varieties will be offered at Milaeger's during our "Vintage Veggie" event to be held May 11-20. Because these new plants are untried and unfamiliar, it's difficult to predict demand. Of course, we plan to grow enough so we won't run out, but we can't guarantee availability so it will be first come, first served, just like last year. Remember, in addition to the new tomatoes offered during "Vintage Veggies", we'll be offering our regular selection of over 100 tomato varieties for you to choose from. And don't forget we plan to offer all of these for you to sample at Tomatomania, to be held this year on Saturday, September 8.