

Picking Peppers and Pepper Pointers



Written by: Kevin Milaeger
May 5, 2021

At Milaeger's we always strive to have a complete, up to date selection of everything we're offering. This year's pepper collection has been revamped with superior varieties that you might like to look at. Our regular pepper collection, available now, consists of fifteen sweet varieties and nineteen hot ones. The sweet peppers come in many sizes and shapes, including bell, bullhorn, banana, and mini. Numerous colors. An increasingly popular type is the mini bell pepper. We've upped production of the smallest, called 'Lunchbox.' Another slightly larger one is called 'Sweetie Pie,' but it's still considered a snacking pepper. In addition to our regular pepper collection, we have our "Vintage Veggie" collection. It's available starting May 13th, and lasts until we run out. There are over sixty vegetables in this group, and this year there are seventeen types of peppers. Since we're trying most of these for the first time, we grow a small quantity, and most are sold out before Memorial Day. Shop early. Eight of these are what I call "savory" peppers. That is, not sweet, but not really hot either. All eight have a Scoville rating of under 1,000. (Jalapeño peppers range from 2,500 to 5,000 Scovilles.) These are all grown for their distinctive flavor, not for sweetness or heat. Perhaps the most appealing is 'Habanada,' a heat free habanero with that unique, fruity habanero flavor. Among the hot peppers in this program you'll find 'Golden Cayenne,' 'Mexican Sunset,' 'Scotch Bonnet Orange,' and 'Death Spiral.' The Scoville rating on the last one is 1,000,000, so buyer beware. **Here's a link to the "Vintage Veggie" collection.**

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Lunchbox

photo courtesy of terretorialseed.com



Habanada

So our pepper selection will be thirty-four varieties available all season, with an additional seventeen during the Vintage Veggie event. There's something for every taste, but keep in mind that many of these peppers have terrific ornamental value. I can't eat the really hot ones, but I grow a few anyway because they are beautiful. Plus I like to give some away to the occasional guest who fancies them.

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Aji Rico

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Alma Paprika

What's the most common error when growing peppers? Planting outdoors too early, by far. When talking about spring planting, the phrase "hardening off" often comes up. This means gradually exposing plants to cooler temperatures, so that there's less shock when they're put outdoors permanently. This is effective with many plants, but less so with peppers. Everyone is anxious to get their green going, I get it. But this error usually causes an entire season of frustration in the case of peppers. It's tempting to want to plant them after we get a few short sleeve weather days. After all, our average last frost day here is April 27. But here is what usually happens. If we are frost free from now on, but we have some cool nights, you probably think that's fine with the pepper plants. But the plants are usually stunted, but since they're still alive and green, you might think all is well. Not so. They can remain stunted for many weeks, considerably delaying the first flush of fruit. This is frustrating for any gardener. Much better to plant them after the night temperature is regularly over fifty degrees. In most years that's after June 1.

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Ancho Gigantea

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Giant Aconcagua

Many of our common vegetables originated in tropical or subtropical climates. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, squash, and cucumbers all have this in common. None of these should be planted before Memorial Day, and then only if the weather forecast is favorable. If you want to prove this to yourself, plant some of these in early May, during one of our warmer spells. Then plant another batch in early June. You'll see that the later planting will not experience any weather related setback, and you'll usually be able to observe progress every day. That's much more rewarding than waiting and wondering why your plants have failed to "take off" even though they're green and we haven't had a frost.

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Piquillo Pimento

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Super Heavyweight

A much better way to satisfy the early planting urge is to plant only plants that are well suited to the cool weather we are certain to get. Onions, especially sets or young plants, radish (from seed), peas, lettuce, spinach, rhubarb, and anything in the cole family (cabbage, kohlrabi, broccoli, cauliflower, collards, and the like.) All of these can be planted as early as the first week of April. (Of course, not if it's unusually cold at that time.) The weather has to be reasonably pleasant and the forecast seasonal or better. Then you can plant these crops, and you'll be delighted with the results.

Please email me (kevin@milaegers.com) with your questions and comments!

Click here to see **Kevin Milaeger's Vintage Ornament Blog**