



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

A Few New Plants & Garden Updates!

Kevin Milaeger

It doesn't happen too often but this year we have some entirely new edible plants. I don't mean a new tomato or pepper, but a whole new category. We are now offering sweet potatoes for the first time. I've read about them and I thought they were only grown in the south. But for years we have been offering the decorative sweet potato vine, and those produce sizeable potatoes, so I thought we should investigate further. So we checked into it and found a northern grower who is offering varieties that will do well in our climate. These tender plants can't be put in the ground until the weather warms, probably in a month or so. Sweet potatoes have a sprawling habit. Their runners will set new roots, which help nurture the plant. Do not remove the runners, or the plant will suffer. We have three varieties of sweet potatoes. 'Beauregard' is ready right now---it matures about 90 days after planting. We also have 'White Yam,' ready for sale in about two weeks. Despite the name, this is not a yam, nor is it white. It is pale yellow, and very sweet, ready about 100 days after planting. Also not a yam is 'Mahon Yam,' a large, orange variety. I'll probably try a couple of each in our test garden to see how they perform.



White Yam



Mahon Yam

perform.

Returning after a five year absence from our lot is horseradish. This is a hardy perennial, an easy-care plant that has been used by mankind since antiquity. You can grow it in any sunny spot. It will multiply over the years; in an abandoned garden, I once saw a single plant that covered over 100 square feet. You harvest it in the fall, after the first frost. Simply dig it up (it has long, carrot-like roots) and take the biggest ones. Put a few small ones back in the ground for next year. You can grate it and use it fresh, but it will be more powerful than the stuff you



buy in jars. It can be preserved with vinegar. There are plenty of recipes out there that you can search for.

horseradish root



**Kevin Milaeger
with rhubarb harvest**

Lastly is an unexpected plant---the peanut. I think this might be fun for kids to try. Probably very few kids realize that peanuts are formed underground. They are a long season crop---about 110 days. They like it hot, so a long hot summer will result in a good crop. A customer told me she grew them in Racine years ago and harvested quite a few peanuts, so I am optimistic.

You will recall that I planted seed of both lettuce and spinach on March 15th. It was fairly warm then, but just after sowing, it turned cool and stayed that way. The spinach sprouted first; a week later, one type of lettuce emerged. The other two still haven't sprouted. Lettuce seed needs light to germinate, so I covered them

very lightly, which I have done many times before. So, I'm not sure what happened. On April 18th I planted lettuce and spinach plants from our Greens to Grow program. Here are some photos. Clearly, you are further ahead with plants, but seed is cheaper. You could argue seed is more fun, but germination is sometimes uncertain. I guess I'll continue to do some of each.



**lettuce from seed planted March 15th (L)
lettuce from plants planted April 18th (R)**

You have heard me talk about Egyptian walking onions on several occasions.



**spinach from seed planted March 15th (L)
spinach from plants planted April 18th (R)**

These are perennial onions, and I leave them in the ground over the winter. My well established plants are large clumps--the biggest is 24" high and about 28" wide this early in the season. They will soon be at least twice that height.

I have them supported by peony rings, but some stems still fall over and the plants "walk" around the garden. Last fall I harvested the bulbils (marble sized onions held on the tips of the stalks) and I stored them in our cooler over



the winter. I planted them in pots on April 22nd. They sprouted quickly and grew a lot in just a week. We'll have them for sale this weekend. Although all parts of this pungent onion are edible, I just like watching them. Visiting friends always ask about them. [Here is a link to our poster](#) that tells more about these delightful plants.



Egyptian walking onions

My rhubarb is just about ready for the first picking. I have it about twenty feet from my house so it doesn't benefit from any house heat. My neighbor, on the other hand, has one plant up against a brick wall, in full southern exposure. That plant has been ready for picking for more than a week. I'm planning on picking some of mine this weekend, and I'll take it over to my mom. She will make either a pie or a torte---we are always wondering which it will be. Both are delicious, and as sure a sign of spring as there is.



**Egyptian walking onions
one week old**

Please email me (kevin@milaegers.com) if you have any questions or comments.

