



Kevin Milaeger

# Milaeger's

## Some Tomato Concerns

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**Now that the vegetable garden** is well on its way, it's time to review some seasonal considerations. At my house, I planted twenty-four tomato plants in containers just over two weeks ago. A few days later I had the cages up and all plants labelled. All plants have now been fertilized with Dr. Earth's Organic Tomato Vegetable and Herb Fertilizer, which I chose because of its high calcium content (more about that later.) All of the axils (suckers) have been removed, and once the plants were established I removed the lowest leaves. Since planting, my plants have about doubled in height and bulk; all have flowers, and about six plants have already set fruit. So far, so good.

Regular readers know that my plants are in fifteen gallon pots, filled with Dr. Earth's Vegetable Garden Planting Mix. Although this product is meant as a garden additive, I like it for pots. More importantly, the plants love it! It is quite



**Dr. Earth Organic Tomato, Vegetable & Herb Fertilizer**



**Dr. Earth Vegetable Garden Planting Mix**

heavy, which helps to keep the pots from blowing over when the plants get large. I suppose the pot size is on the large side; you could get by with ten gallon pots but I like the larger size for the weight, to give the roots plenty of room, and because they don't dry out as quickly as smaller pots. I chose the Dr. Earth fertilizer because it has more calcium than any fertilizer I've seen. Calcium is important in combatting Blossom End Rot (BER), a common malady that affects tomatoes and peppers. BER manifests itself on the bottom, or "blossom end" of the tomato fruit with a black leathery patch...decidedly unappetizing. It is believed that a lack of calcium is the cause (uneven watering is likely a secondary cause.) Early in the season, when the plant is in rapid growth, the calcium supply can't keep up with the growth rate and BER is

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the result. I think of BER as a condition, rather than a disease because it is not fatal and it is usually temporary. It is most common with the first fruit set---later in the season, you don't have to worry about it much. Despite my precautions, I carefully inspect early fruit for BER; if I find it, I immediately remove the fruit--I want the plant's energy to be channeled to fruit that will be edible.



**axil**

Speaking of plant illnesses, you probably know that many diseases are referred to as "soil borne." Damp soil is an

ideal environment for many diseases to establish themselves. This is why I trim off the lower leaves on my tomato plants. I want no leaves touching the ground, and the air should circulate freely. I want to do everything I can to curb the disease breeding area. For a similar reason, I don't ever get the tomato leaves wet, especially later in the day. Wet leaves overnight can contribute to disease. What about rain? Well, we can't control the rain, but we can control how we water.



**axil removal**

Removal of the axils (suckers) is a common cultural practice with tomatoes, but not all experts are in agreement. This easy task concerns only the indeterminate (vine) tomato plants;

determinate (bush) plants do not benefit from this treatment. An axil is a branch of growth that appears in the crotch formed by the main stem and a side leaf branch. The axils are usually removed when they are fairly small, less than 3" in length. Removing them encourages new vertical growth, which increases production. I remove the axils on my plants until the first fruits have set. That is, when the first flush of flowers has been successfully pollinated, and fruit has started to form. It is a quick procedure. Removing the axils on all my plants took only a few minutes.

With these simple chores done I can now start to focus on other upcoming issues, such as varmints!



Our test garden at Milaeger's on Douglas is coming along nicely too---it is located at the north end of our parking lot, in front



**typical tomato 32" tall**

of our office. We will be having a little garden soiree on Tuesday, June 17th from 6:00-7:30. Stop by if you'd like to have a look, and join in the garden chat with our staff and other local gardeners. This is a free event. Light refreshments. Please [email me](#) if you plan to come---we'd like to have some idea on the number of guests.