



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Tomatoes, Cukes, and a Whimsical Onion

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It's been two weeks since I planted my tomatoes and they are progressing nicely. The weather has been mostly favorable. The plants were about 18-20" tall when they were planted, and now they are averaging nearly 30". They have put on some bulk, too, so I just removed some of the lowest branches to improve air circulation and to prevent the spread of soil borne diseases. Many of the plants are in bloom or have already set fruit. Oftentimes in June I get questions from customers about tomato plants that bloomed, but no fruit was formed. Tomato flowers sometimes abort if the plant is under severe stress. The stress could be something like uneven watering, or an extreme weather condition. The most common problem is a



Tomatoes two days after planting



Tomatoes two weeks after planting

few days of rainy weather during blooming. I like to plant a number of different varieties, so their blooming times are staggered. That assures you that not all your plants will be affected by occasional weather extremes.

All my tomatoes are planted in the same growing mix---Black Gold "Garden Compost Blend." This is my first time using this mix, and the plants are doing well so far. I have fertilized once with Jobe's Organic Vegetable fertilizer, and I will apply it again soon. I sprayed the foliage with copper fungicide on June 10, in

an effort to reduce the likelihood of blight. Keep in mind that this is not any sort of guarantee. It might be compared to getting a flu shot---having received the shot, no one is going to guarantee that you won't get the flu. But it is less likely. I will try to stay on schedule and spray every ten days or so. (You need to reapply the spray if rain washes it off.)



I told you about my disappointing radish experience in a recent blog. Once that sort of thing happens, I think it is best to get rid of the failed crop and put in something else. There is no sense in staring at a crop that is not going to improve; better to try and salvage some of the season. So I pulled out the sad radishes and planted some specialty cucumbers. Here is a [link to a blog](#) I wrote about them some time ago. Since that blog I have done some trialing of the small cukes (the thin skinned ones that don't require peeling), and I have come to prefer an Israeli-bred variety called 'Beit



Cucumber 'Sugar Crunch'

Alpha.' It is tasty and prolific. This year I will compare it with 'Sugar Crunch,' a promising newcomer. Burpee says it is disease resistant and will produce 60-70 cukes per plant! In addition to being thin skinned, these are both nearly seedless (burpless) and also parthenocarpic. This last term means that most of their flowers are female, so there will be plenty of fruit. (No, they are not genetically modified.) All of these great attributes come at a cost---the seed is very expensive so at Milaeger's we must sell the plants for

more than regular cukes. At our greenhouse, I caught one "customer" removing some of these specialty cukes from their pot, and trying to stuff them into a smaller, less expensive pot. He explained that he couldn't understand why some plants

Photo: Ric Bessin, University of Kentucky Entomology

cost more than others. Really? When he goes to buy, say, a new shirt, does he think all the shirts in the store should be the same price? Anyway, I planted my cukes just in time to take advantage of some nice June rain. I think I'll be picking within a week or so. It is important to pick cukes at the right time. If the label or seed packet says 6", then pick the cukes at that size. They would grow larger, but the flavor quality will not be the same. With cukes, bigger usually means "bitter."



Cucumber beetles

One gardening habit that I inadvertently acquired over the years is to smell



the roots of a plant after I have taken it out of the pot, just before I plant it. Having done this a lot, I know there are a wide range of smells. With practice, you will sometimes know what you are planting without even seeing it. You can also tell if something isn't quite right; healthy roots have a "certain scent." When I sniffed the cucumber roots I was amazed at how they smelled



**Egyptian Walking Onion
tangled with bindweed**

plus. Once the cukes start producing, you should check for pickable fruit every other day, and if the weather is really hot, you should check every day. They grow that fast, especially with adequate moisture. If there are more than you need, pick them anyway, to encourage new flowers. Rather than breaking off the fruit, use clippers--- you don't want to tear the stems.

I like to have a few fun things in the garden. One is the Egyptian Walking Onion, which I have written about in the past---[here is a link](#).

These bizarre perennial onions are just now at a wonderful stage, producing "Dr. Seuss-like" clusters of onions at the tops of long stems. They are always attention getters. One of my plants is getting tangled up with bindweed. Sometimes I like to let weeds grow too, just for fun.

exactly like fresh sliced cucumbers. I can't believe I never noticed this before, and I am guessing that some varieties are more fragrant than others.

Some folks have problems with cucumber beetles. The beetles chew on the leaves and can spread disease. After the cukes are planted, cover the soil with a light mulch. The beetles lay their eggs in the soil, so limiting their access to the soil is a



**Egyptian Walking
Onions**

