



Kevin Milaeger

# Milaeger's

## Trials and Tribulations in the Veggie Garden!

Kevin Milaeger

**Like many folks,** I don't always follow my own advice. But this year I did, and now I'm glad. Wednesday June 3rd was a fine morning, and I spent some time planting tomatoes at my place. The weather forecasters are calling for all night temperatures to be above 50 for the foreseeable future, so that is the signal that it's safe to plant tomatoes and other tender plants. Last weekend we experienced low temperatures in the mid 40's, along with high winds. The cool temperatures will possibly stunt tomato plants, but coupled with high winds, things can get ugly. Since the weekend I have talked to a number of customers who lost plants due to the weather---mostly tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers. To give you an idea of the severity of the weather, here is a photo of my well established rhubarb, the day after the storm.



**Wind damage rhubarb**



**Tomatoes two days after planting**

Also, my raspberry plants were beat up, and the new growth on a viburnum shrub was all torn up. Anyway, with the storm passed, on June 3rd I planted my twenty tomato plants in 15 gallon pots, all the while listening to the chatter of catbirds and red breasted woodpeckers as they went about their business. It was a very pleasant way to start the day. The plants average about 18-20" tall, with a couple topping two feet. Within a couple of days all the tomato cages were in place, and fully labeled for easy identification. Then I applied some granular Jobe's organic vegetable

fertilizer. It has added calcium, to help reduce the likelihood of blossom end rot.

When I plant tomatoes I remove the suckers, also known as axils. These are the growths that occur between the main vertical stem and the original side shoots. I do that to force the growth



upwards. Soon after, when the flowers first appear, I discontinue sucker removal. When the fruits develop, I want the foliar growth to shade them, to



**Tomato sucker**



**Tomato sucker removal**

prevent sunscald should the weather be hot. Not all gardeners agree about sucker removal. If you have had success with a different method, I encourage you to stay with that method. I don't argue with success.

Once the tomato plant has put on a foot or so of growth, I prune off the lowest branches. As I mentioned in an earlier blog, this is to increase airflow around the plant, and to keep water from splashing up on the leaves when I water them. Since I had some blight last year, I am going to start early with a regimen of organic copper fungicide spray to reduce the risk of disease. I've used this remedy other years, but I was usually trying to stop the existing disease, rather than prevent it. If we get some warm weather I expect to pick fruit from the early varieties in the first part of July.

Not everything is "rosy" in my garden. This year I am very disappointed with the radishes. I've had success in previous years so I guess I just thought that was normal. This year I have been plagued with root



**Root maggot damage**

maggots. The plants came up fine, but I guess when my back was turned the garden was visited by a small fly-like insect which laid its eggs on my plants. The resulting larvae are called root maggot, and they feed on radishes and other crops. Not all of the radishes have been damaged, but those that have been attacked are inedible. They would not look good on your table. Short of using a chemical, the best way to counter this problem is with

row covers. Think miniature greenhouses---small tunnels, covered with a fine mesh. The insects can't get in, but the light can. They should be put up before insects first appear. The row covers aren't particularly attractive, but they look much better than a pile of disfigured radishes.

The other problem with my radishes is that they are smaller than in other years. I didn't realize that they need to be watered frequently to help them reach their full size. In years past there has been enough rain so the radishes were big and fat. This year they are smallish. Looking back, I think we did have a few dry spells this year. Live and learn.

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