



Kevin Milaeger

# Milaeger's

## My Tomatoes are Blushing! ---July Garden Update

Kevin Milaeger

**The local meteorologists** have concluded that June was a cooler than average month. Although July started rather cool, it now looks like summer is here to stay. Things look pretty good in the garden, but some crops are behind their normal schedule. (I'm not implying that we've ever had a "normal" year!)

For the most part, my tomato plants look very healthy and some of the early varieties that produce golf ball sized fruit or smaller have a good fruit set, and are now starting to ripen. So far three varieties are showing color---'Sweet Baby Girl,' 'Sun Gold,' and 'Slava Plum.' Every time I have to



**Sweet Baby Girl**

buy a package of tomatoes at the grocery store I am hoping it will be my last of the season, and now I'm pretty sure I am at that point.



**Sun Gold**

I'm growing about 50 assorted pepper plants this year. Most are in the trial garden at Milaeger's, and about ten are at my home garden. Like the tomatoes, they are faring well. I always pick off the early peppers well before they turn their final ripe color (usually red.) This is to encourage the plant to

produce more flowers, and therefore more fruit. A plant produces flowers (and therefore fruit) in an effort to produce seed, to perpetuate itself. If you allow the early fruit (seed) to reach maturity, the plant thinks its goal has been accomplished, and so produces few fruit from that point on. If that early fruit is picked before the seed is



mature, the plant is stimulated to produce more flowers in an effort to regenerate the species before summer is over. Those early, unripe fruits are less nutritious than fully ripe fruit, but I still enjoy their flavor.



**Fanfare**

I planted about eight cucumbers this year; six are parthenocarpic



**Iznik**

(producing only female flowers) and two are a standard variety called 'Fanfare.' So far I have picked at least ten cukes off the parthenocarpic plants. These are smaller, thin skinned cukes, so peeling is not necessary. They are also seedless, or nearly so. The 'Fanfare' plants had an early start---you may remember my blog about using "season extenders"; if not, [click here](#). In the early season, most of the flowers on cucurbits (cucumbers and related plants) are male, but a few are female. Fertilization was successful and I now have some cukes that are nearly

ready---they grow fast in warm weather.

Tomato plants are subject to various diseases, some much worse than others. Septoria Leaf spot

is one that often shows up early in the season. It is a fungal disease, so the spores are in nature and is therefore always a potential problem. No tomato varieties are resistant to it. Fortunately, it is not as serious as some other diseases and is treatable.

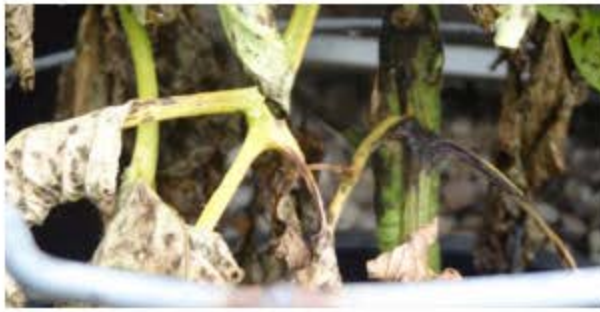
Septoria is sometimes confused with early blight, and to make it more complicated, a plant could have both diseases at the same time. The diseases are usually fairly easy to distinguish. Early blight



**Septoria Leaf Spot**



has small tan blotches, irregularly shaped, sometimes roundish. Each spot has distinct concentric rings, oftentimes referred to as a "target." Septoria has small tan spots, but they are either solid tan or there is



**Early Blight**

sometimes a black speck in the center. Another telling feature is that with early blight, the spot can also have a yellow "halo" surrounding it---such is the case on one of my (now destroyed) plants. Foolishly, I had assumed it was Septoria, not having inspected it close enough. Septoria almost

always starts on the lowest leaves, and works its way up, the leaves eventually turning yellow then brown, and eventually falling off. The fruit is not directly affected. This disease flourishes in a wet, moist and humid environment. Removing the lower leaves of the plant (I recommended this in an earlier blog) will increase air circulation and diminish moisture. Also, when you water the plants try to water only the soil, not the leaves.

Septoria is just starting on at least one of my plants. If you want to treat it, here is what to do. Carefully snip off and destroy all affected leaves.

(Do not compost them---the spores are not carried over the winter in soil, but in decomposing leaves and stems.) When you are finished, wash off your clippers and your hands. Get some copper spray that is suitable for organic gardening (see photo) and apply it to the leaves that are near the affected leaves. This is best applied as a preventative, but it will help arrest the progress of the disease if it has already started. You will need to reapply after rain.

Tomatoes aren't the only plants to get this disease. Other plants in your garden may also have it. Keep an eye on pepper and eggplant, both of which are related to tomatoes. Septoria is often not a fatal disease. However, it can significantly weaken a plant, and a weakened plant does not produce much fruit.

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

