



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

The August Harvest Begins

Kevin Milaeger

Midsummer is upon us, and as many customers comment every year about the weather---"It's been a funny year." Idiosyncratic weather is what we have come to expect. A local meteorologist reported that July was 3.5 degrees cooler than average. That sounds like quite a bit to me. I know my tomato plants agree.

Their growth is significantly behind that of other years. I normally start picking the early varieties around the first week of July. This year serious picking (of early varieties) started around July 25th. If that isn't troublesome enough, I think their flavor has suffered with the cooler temperatures. My cherry tomatoes seem fine, but 'Bloody Butcher,' my favorite early variety, has been less flavorful than usual so far. I attribute it to cool weather; warm temperatures would increase the natural sugar content, a significant factor in flavor. I'll grow 'Bloody Butcher' again, but I have already started to look for a replacement---next year I'll

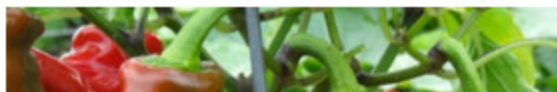


be doing a comparison taste test. The competitive world is a tough place, and in the search for improvement, sentimentality has no place. Of course that's just in my little corner of the world---in your garden you can do whatever makes you happy.



Mariachi Pepper

Peppers have been coloring up for the past week or so. One common misconception that I encounter with first time pepper growers concerns the pepper ripening process. The customer bought "red pepper plants" and wants to know why they are green. All peppers change color when they ripen. Most, but not all, start out green. They can be eaten before they are mature,



but the flavor differs considerably when fully ripe, especially with sweet peppers. Perhaps more importantly, nutritional value is greater when mature. 'Mariachi,' a 4" long tapered pepper with mild heat, starts out pale yellow, and finishes scarlet red. 'Melrose' is a 5" long, sweet Italian frying pepper. It starts out green and finishes deep red. It is a regional favorite, apparently originating in Chicago. 'Mini Belle Mix' ripens to assorted colors, this one golden orange. It is a sweet pepper, and it has a compact habit---ideal for container culture.



Melrose Pepper

Most of the early garden crops finished weeks ago. The few remaining lettuce, radishes, spinach, peas, and others have been stripped from the garden and relegated to the compost heap. In the last week of July I



Mini Belle Mix Pepper

sowed more carrots and lettuce to fill in some of the space. I'll plant radish seed in mid-August for a late harvest, and some lettuce and kale starter plants around September 1st. Some of you experienced lettuce growers might be thinking that midsummer is the wrong time to sow lettuce seed. Yes, that is what all the books say. But in this cooler year, I'd like to give it a try. I found two varieties offered by Italian seed companies, and the seed packet suggests planting them anytime throughout the summer months. I figure most of Italy is warm, so maybe they'll be okay.

I'm not worried about how well they will grow; I'm worried about their flavor.

My onions are doing well. I planted sets (marble sized onions) about April 20th. I just started to pull some onions and the largest ones look to be nearly 4" wide. The rule for harvesting this type of onion is that when the tops of half the onion plants fall over, they are ready. At that time, gently pull them out of the ground and clean off excess dirt. Leave them lying in the garden for about a week while they "cure." They need dry sunny weather to cure properly, so if the weather is wet you can lay them out in your garage on cardboard---at least they'll be dry, if not sunny. Leave the garage doors open when possible, to help them dry. When the leaves are crinkly, clip the tops so they are an inch long, trim off the roots, and peel off any excess skin. Then



you can store them in the mesh onion bags that you saved last winter, from store bought onions. Good ventilation is important for successful storage.

Sweet Spanish Onion

Carrots can be harvested any time now. When carrots are mature, they



**Kevin Milaeger
with Denver's Half Long Carrots**

acquire the color they are supposed to have---like you see on the seed packet. (Not all carrots are dark orange.) When immature, their pale color is still evident, and the nutritional value has not yet peaked. I sowed the seed for mine during the third week of April. At that time of year the seed takes more than two weeks to germinate. If the weather is cooler than usual the seed can take more than three weeks to sprout. I love harvesting carrots. They are so sweetly fragrant when they are just pulled out of the ground, and the flavor is intense.

Tomatomania 2014 is less than a month away----we hope you'll join us. It always a lot of fun and the tasting is free! [Click here](#) to read about the event! This is what this year's Tomatomania t-shirt looks like.



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