



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Winter Planning, Winter Reading

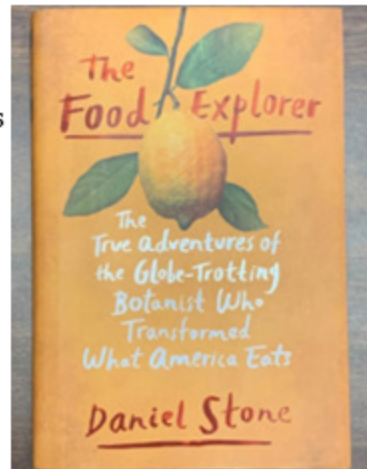
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I've about finished looking through this year's seed catalogs. They started arriving before Thanksgiving, but I wasn't in the mood to look at them until after Christmas. After reading the catalogs for the umpteenth time, I had a hankering to read more about food plants, and I found a newly published book that I want to share with you. It's called "The Plant Explorer," by Daniel Stone. It's a biography of David Fairchild, a botanist and



**Kevin Milaeger with
Dinosaur Kale (laciniato)**

plant explorer. Years ago I read Fairchild's autobiography and another book about his plant hunting collaboration with Barbour



Lathrop. Fairchild traveled the world in search of plants that might have potential as crop plants in the United States. He is responsible for bringing us mangoes, avocados, kale, soybeans, pistachios, quinoa, and many other foods. This was around 1900, so all travel was by boat, and sometimes by train. But there weren't many trains in remote parts of the world,

so it also included horseback or hiking. All this makes for a great story and I recommend it to anyone interested in the history of food, travel, general history, or just a good read.

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com

Just to be clear, Fairchild wasn't necessarily the very first person to bring these plants into the United States. Travelers had doubtless brought some of these plants into the States, but they remained in private collections, known only to a small number of enthusiasts. Fairchild worked mostly for the USDA. He was responsible for finding new plants, and for convincing farmers to grow them. This wasn't



easy, because in 1900, for example, no one had ever heard of avocados, so

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Australian Yellowleaf lettuce

was being cultivated by many farmers. Fairchild wasn't particularly enamored of the flavor, but he had a feeling that kale had value, so he brought it to America. It never really caught on here, but around 1990 it was discovered to have "more iron than beef, and more calcium, iron, and vitamin K than almost anything that sprouts from the soil." Since then, it's reached new status as a "superfood." It's easy to dismiss kale, especially when we see it in the grocery store, where it often looks wilted and rather sad. But grown fresh in the garden, and picked young, it is very desirable. When making a salad, I try to make kale about 10% of the greenery, and there are many types to choose from. We offer five in our Spring G2G program.



Scarlet kale

there was no demand for them. The same was true for other plant introductions.

Books such as this are an inspiration for me as I search, in an armchair sort of way, for new plants to offer you. I start out the year by reviewing our "Greens to Grow" program. These are starter plants that we offer around April 1, because they can tolerate cool weather. Around 1900, Fairchild found kale growing in abundance in the upper Adriatic region, where it

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Cherokee lettuce

This year's greens program has 41 different greens.

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Frizzy Lizzy mustard

[Here is a link](#) to a spreadsheet about them. About half of them are lettuces. Many are red leaf types, those being the most nutritious. My favorites are the mustard greens. Like kale, I use only a small percentage of mustard in a salad—their flavor is quite strong, so that's all you need. Some people think of mustard greens as "hot," but I think pungent or zesty is more accurate. If there is any heat, it dissipates quickly. When you visit our stores this Spring, check out the greens display, and sample a pinch of mustard greens—you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Please email me (kevin@milaeqers.com) with your questions and comments!