



**Kevin Milaeger**

*Milaeger's*

## **Tomatoes 2019--- A New Record!**

**Kevin Milaeger**

**A record, yes, but not one to brag about.** This is the latest start to the tomato season that I can remember. I planted sixteen good sized plants on June 6th, and not one has yet borne any edible fruit. In years past, my plants have always produced by the first week of July. Not on all varieties, of course, but the cherry and grape tomatoes for sure, and other early types like 'Bloody Butcher.' This year's plants look healthy, and have been fertilized three times. 'Jasper,' a cherry tomato, is now over 6' tall, and has about sixty fruits on it---all green! Sometimes flowers fail to pollinate, but I was watching closely during flowering, and I didn't see any problems. (You never get 100% fruit set.) Right now, the biggest fruits on my plants are about 3" wide, but those varieties ('Brandy Man' and 'Buffalo Steak') usually ripen at more than 4", so maybe another ten days. I guess things just progress more slowly when the start of the gardening season is a prolonged cool spell. But we all know gardeners must be patient.



**home plants, July 15**

We have a little garden at Milaeger's, with about twenty tomato plants. Most are dwarf types that we are evaluating for the first time. From that garden, we had one red fruit on 'Bloody Butcher' just before the Fourth, but it had blossom end rot. The Milaeger's garden is about three miles from Lake Michigan, and my home garden is much closer to the lake. In summer, it's always at least several degrees "cooler near the lake," sometimes as much as fifteen degrees difference, just in that three-mile distance. I guess that could account for the delay in ripening at my house. But it doesn't account for the overall lateness.



**Buffalo Steak, July 16**

I have a friend who lives in Williams Bay, Wisconsin, at the western edge of Lake

Geneva. That's about forty miles from Lake Michigan. He is growing twenty some tomato plants and his plants are a lot like mine. Big and bushy, with lots of green fruit. He has yet to pick one tomato. I'm sure his weather has been warmer than Racine, but his results so far are the same as mine.

Though the tomatoes are late, at least I've had plenty of cucumbers to enjoy. Like tomatoes, cucumbers originated in a warm climate, so they thrive in heat. It surprises me a little that they are doing so well this year, but mine weren't planted until about June 10<sup>th</sup>, after the coolest weather was past. I don't have any at my home garden, just in the garden at Milaeger's, so it's a little warmer there. Regular readers know I only grow mini cucumbers. It's not that mini cukes taste any better than larger, traditional cukes. With larger cukes, I usually use only half of one when I make a salad. The remainder goes in the

fridge, and when I finally want to use it, it's mushy. So, I grow 'Mini Munch,' which should be picked at no more than 5", just the right size for my nightly



**Mini Munch**

salad. It has very thin skin so no peeling is necessary, another plus. Seeds for this variety are very expensive. 'Mini Munch' is parthenocarpic, which means it produces only female flowers, and therefore lots of cukes, so the extra cost is justified. With all cucumbers, it's important to harvest at the recommended size---check the plant label or seed packet for that information. If you let them get larger, the flavor will be compromised, quite bitter. One sign of bad flavor is the skin starts to turn yellow. Don't eat yellow cukes. To prove my point, I sampled the yellowish cuke in the photo---Yuck!



**BHN 589, a new dwarf,  
as yet unnamed, July 16**