



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Top Varieties at Tomatomania 2015!

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Tomatomania 2015 was a resounding success. There was a nice sized crowd, and everyone that I talked with had a great time. A week or two before the event I was worried about the tomato supply, but we had plenty---well over 1000 pounds.

I personally count all the taste test ballots and tally all the votes. For a tomatomaniac like me, it's fun. Remember, this is Tomato Idol---if a tomato variety doesn't get the votes, it likely goes out of production at Milaeger's. So, your votes matter very much. (If you weren't able to attend, you can always email me your preferences---I can't guarantee we'll grow them, but it certainly doesn't hurt.)



'Sun Sugar' has been a winner or serious contender for a number of years now. This year, it was the runaway choice, garnering almost twice as many votes as the next most popular tomato of any type.



'Sun Sugar' is a cherry tomato, orangey-yellow when fully ripe. It is among the sweetest tomatoes. A vigorous grower and prolific bearer, it's also easy to grow and rewarding. The few folks who don't like it say it's too sweet, that it lacks the true tomato flavor they seek. While it's true that some tomato varieties are more tomatoey, it's hard to beat 'Sun Sugar' for eating right off the vine when you're in the garden. I wouldn't be without it.



Sun Sugar

The mid-late season large red tomatoes are our most popular tomatoes. This year's winner in that category is 'Rose de Berne,' a relative newcomer to our list. I guess we've been offering it for five years or so. This variety is average size, generally 6-8 ounces, with an occasional larger fruit. The shape is typical tomato, but slightly flattened. It bears heavily and has a fairly thin skin, so you will probably never see it in a grocery store. A close second behind 'Rose de Berne' is 'Big Zac.'



Big Zac

This is a huge tomato, often exceeding two pounds. If you want to grow something you can brag about, this is it. It's a beefsteak type and has won a number of awards nationwide. It was bred by an amateur gardener (using heirloom parents) and introduced about twenty years ago. It has been among the favorites here in recent years.

A category that has become more appealing for many gardeners is the shorter growing types that are easier to control. We call them "container friendly" tomatoes. The clear favorite here was 'Husky Cherry Red,' which has been around for many years and is a consistently high performer. Not really a cherry tomato in my book, it is about golf ball sized, so I think of it as a salad tomato, and I usually quarter them for that use. The plant has an unusually thick, sturdy stem and only grows about forty inches tall, so it doesn't really need any support.

The novelty tomato category has also been gaining in popularity. More people ask about them every year. They like the unusual colors and unique flavors. Top vote getters here were 'Kellogg's Breakfast' and 'Wapsipinicon Peach'; both are yellow varieties.



Kellogg's Breakfast

The former is considerably larger than 'WP', and darker yellow in color. "WP" is a little smaller than a tennis ball, light yellow in color, and covered with a thin coating of fuzz, hence the name. I don't particularly like the fuzzy aspect, but I can't argue with the flavor. Many yellow tomatoes are rather bland, so the search continues for more flavorful varieties---maybe one of these two will work for you. One newcomer novelty that did well is 'Mint Julep.' There is no mint flavor, so I think using that word in the name was not a good idea, but we are stuck with it. This is a smallish tomato (but much larger than 'Yellow Pear'), distinctly pear shaped, and beautifully colored. It is emerald green, with flashy yellow streaks. I'm sure chefs will love it as it makes a great

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Rose de Berne

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Husky Cherry Red

There is no mint flavor, so I think using that word in the name was not a good idea, but we are stuck with it. This is a smallish tomato (but much larger than 'Yellow Pear'), distinctly pear shaped, and beautifully colored. It is emerald green, with flashy yellow streaks. I'm sure chefs will love it as it makes a great



presentation. The inner flesh is bright green, just like the well-known variety it is descended from---'Green



Mint Julep

Zebra.' It is a naturally occurring variant, and fortunately the seed is stable. That is, it varies little, if at all. Flavor is said to be slightly sweeter than 'Green Zebra,' but I would still describe it as tangy.



Wapsipinicon Peach

The paste category is a curious one. Many of the folks that grow these make their own sauce, so the tomatoes are not eaten fresh. But the Tomatomania tasting can help you judge the acidity level and

the sugar content, as well as other factors such as meatiness and seed quantity. The top vote getter was 'Striped Roma.' We always sell a good quantity of these plants, but I can't help but think its striking appearance may have had some effect on its popularity. It is sometimes called "horn-shaped," about four inches long. Its orange red skin is boldly streaked with yellow. The flesh is solid red, meaty, and with few seeds.



Striped Roma

Interestingly, our two best-selling paste tomatoes are 'Roma' and 'San Marzano.' But they did poorly in the taste test---'Striped Roma' got five times more votes than those two combined.



Here is a link to the Tomatomania voting results. They are presented two ways---[overall popularity](#), and [popularity by type](#). I think the "popularity by type" list is more telling. I don't see the point in comparing the taste of a cherry tomato to the taste of a paste tomato, for example. But we offer it both ways, and you are the judge.

If you weren't able to attend this year's event, we hope to see you next year. My favorite quote of the day came from a customer who said it was their "favorite day of the year." Mine too!