



Kevin Milaeger

*Milaeger's*

## Cool Spring---What it Means for Vegetables!

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**If you've spent any time** outdoors this spring you know that temperatures have been cooler than normal (whatever that is!). I've talked to a lot of gardeners, and there is general agreement that it has been a cool spring, and remains so, especially along the lakefront.

For gardeners, the night temperature is a most telling indicator. Even in early June of this year, the night temperature has dipped into the 40's. That is not a problem for many of our garden plants, including anything in the cabbage family (Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower), onions, radishes, peas, lettuce, carrots, spinach, and many herbs. But it is a problem for many of the vegetables that we grow that

are of tropical or subtropical origin. Now, most people don't pay a lot of attention to the geographical origin of a given plant, but this can be very useful information---plus, nowadays the information is just a click away, so there is no excuse not to check. Our most popular vegetables fall into this category of tropical/subtropical. Tomato, pepper, and squash are all from Central America, Mexico, or northern South America.



**Deer Tongue Lettuce**





**Rouge d'Hiver Lettuce**

Eggplant and cucumber are from India, and neighboring countries. All those places are very warm, so the plants that originated there are most at home in warm (and hot) temperatures. Expert's opinions vary, but most agree that all of these plants should not be planted outdoors until we have night temperatures of at least 50 degrees; some even say as high as 60. So, what will happen if the night temperatures are too cool? For some, the plants will be stunted. This will probably not be

immediately obvious. Prolonged cool temperatures will cause tomato plants to have a purplish cast, a sure indication of stunting. It takes a long time to recover from that. If the cold temperatures are accompanied by rain or wind, plants can easily die. During cool, wet weather, their roots can easily rot. These warm loving plants do not like cool temperatures. They don't really start growing until the weather warms.

This all sounds kind of scary, but you can avoid all these problems by just waiting until the warm weather arrives. I am as anxious as anyone to get out in the garden. And I do, but in the early spring, I focus on those cool loving plants that I've already mentioned. I put the

earliest ones in during the first week of April, and others in succeeding weeks. I've been harvesting for weeks now, so that is very satisfying. At home, I planted my tomatoes on May 28. They have done fine, despite the cool nights, only because of their protected location. I have waited to plant the cukes, eggplant, and peppers. Those will go in this weekend, despite some cool temps that linger---I can't wait any longer!



**I've been harvesting radishes every other day for about two weeks.**