



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Its Mid-October---the End is Near!

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Our average first frost date is October 17, so it's time to prepare for the end of the garden season. The last of the tomatoes have already been picked (but their flavor was fading anyway). Similarly, the late cucumbers were nothing like those harvested in August---they were bitter, and even their shapes had been distorted. So the cucumber vines and other plants of tropical origin have now been pulled from the garden, as part of the end of season cleanliness campaign. It pays to do a thorough job, since serious diseases can be carried over in the soil. Plants such as tomatoes, peppers and others in the "nightshade" family should be burned or otherwise disposed of---do not put them in the compost pile, even if you think they were disease free. Better to err on the safe side. Once the garden is cleaned up I feel rather satisfied. Despite its bareness, my garden looks much tidier than it has in months. It makes the prospect of next year's garden that much more appealing.



**Kevin Milaeger with
Dinosaur Kale**

Of course some plants are not harmed by light frost. Leek, radish, lettuce, kale, and others can be enjoyed and harvested for weeks to come. The dinosaur kale plants that



Kale 'Redbor'

were planted in mid-April are now enormous, befitting their name. I don't use a lot of kale in the kitchen---I mostly grow this kind because I like its bold, striking presence. Some of the vegetable vendors at our Great Lakes Farmers Market sell a lot of this type of kale---I guess I should ask them what their customers do with it. Kale soup, perhaps? Late last spring, I planted 'Redbor' kale. Often thought of as an ornamental plant, it is edible, with the best flavor coming after a frost. It's been looking great all summer, but now its beautiful coloring is intensifying as the weather cools. The plants will likely look good well into November, possibly even December.

Not too many plants do that. You can even pick a few kale leaves for use as table decorations.

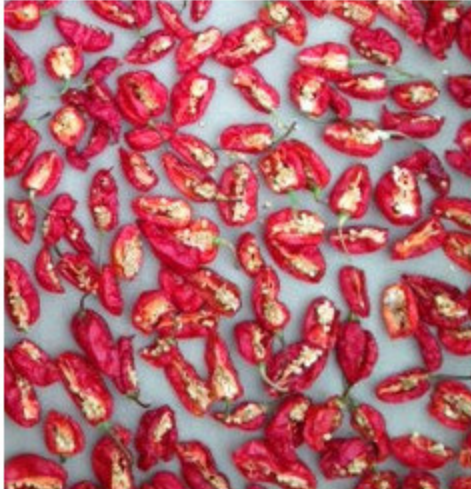
I was chatting with one of the vendors at our Farmer's Market recently. Her Brussels

sprouts looked great. They were larger than mine, so I asked her about her soil. She said her soil wasn't that good; she felt that the large size was because she pruned the flower heads, forcing the plant's energy into the sprouts rather than flowers and seeds. Sounds like an experiment to be tried next year to see if that is true. If it is any consolation, it seems Europeans prefer smaller sprouts because they are tenderer, so there is that to consider.

Over the years, we've had trouble finding reliable sources for certain seed, so we have taken to harvesting our own. One category we focus on is the ultra-hot pepper---'Carolina Reaper' and the like. Some of our greenhouse crew are skittish about handling these brilliantly colored beauties. The pepper heat can penetrate through two layers of gloves and clothing. You can also get the fumes in your nose, so



Grilling sprouts



Pepper 'Carolina Reaper'

our crew works next to huge fans that draw the fumes away from them. Even so, someone almost always accidentally touches their skin or eye and gets uncomfortable for a while. We also save seed for a few tomato varieties. But this year we have a problem---we failed to save enough seed of 'Kenosha Paste.' Would any of you happen to have extra seed, or fruit that we can harvest seed from? It would help us a lot if you did. Please email me if you can help.

Despite the cool temperatures that are normal for this time of year, raspberries continue to produce. My little patch yielded a cereal bowlful on October 12th, and another a couple of days later. The fruit size is getting smaller, but they still taste wonderful. A sweet end to summer!