



**Kevin Milaeger**

# Milaeger's

## July Tomato Update--- a few concerns

Kevin Milaeger

**My tomato plants** continue to thrive, I think. I'm trying to do all the right things, but sometimes I have issues, too. This past weekend I picked a few cherry tomatoes, and also a couple of 'Bloody Butcher,' which is a little larger than a cherry. The 'Bloody Butcher' tasted so good after about eight months of store bought tomatoes. I think it will be a couple weeks yet before any of the large fruits are ready, although some are sizeable right now. There are a few that already weigh more than a pound, I'm sure. When the plants start to bloom, it's easy to get excited about all the potential fruit. But remember that not all flowers will get fertilized. Tomatoes are self-pollinating, but sometimes weather conditions keep them from getting completely pollinated, and then the flowers often abort. A prolonged rainy spell, or excessive heat or cold are the most common factors that thwart pollination. If that happens, don't despair---there will be more flowers soon. I just put a



**large fruit on 'Copper River'**



**ALGOplus**

second application of Espoma Tomato and Vegetable granular fertilizer on my tomatoes. The plants look good but the growth rate seems to have slowed. I wonder if the plants are now putting their energy into fruit production rather than foliar growth. I'm not measuring them regularly; it's just a feeling I'm getting. To be on the safe side, I'm adding some liquid AlgoPlus fertilizer (formerly Algoflash). Liquid fertilizers are quicker acting than granular, and this one is relatively mild, so I'm not worried about burning the plants.

The leaf color on my tomatoes is a good dark green, but a few of my plants have some yellow leaves, so I started spraying with copper fungicide. I would encourage you to do the same if you have some

yellow leaves. The label says it is for "organic gardening" and can be used within one day of harvest. While I was checking out this product (made by Bonide), I was curious about another Bonide product on our shelf called

"Fung-onil." Reading the label, it seemed very close to the first product, plus you could also use it right up to harvest. I contacted Bonide and asked them what the difference was. They said neither was better than the other, but recommended alternating the two products. So that's my new strategy for early season disease control. Turning to another issue....despite my prediction in an earlier blog that blossom end rot would not be much of a problem this year, I have had a touch it. On my twenty-six plants I've found about eight fruit with the condition. That's much less than usual, at least.



**yellow tomato leaf**

You recall I mentioned I was going to plant three large sweet pepper plants in one of the fifteen gallon pots. I did that about three weeks ago and they



**Copper Fungicide (L), Fung-onil (R)**

look really good. They are all just over two feet tall now. All have fruit, and plenty of new flowers. The leaves have great color, which is something I always keep an eye on. My spot happens to be particularly windy, so I put a peony cage around the three plants---I don't want the stems to get snapped off; that is a sorry site.

soil I'm trying. It's called "Bumper Crop Organic Soil Builder." This is the first year we have offered it at Milaeger's. The bag says you should mix it in with your existing soil, but I just put it right in the pot, and started planting. I was a little worried because the soil seemed pretty dense, not light and fluffy, like many potting soils. But then I realized that mother earth herself has rather dense soil, so I'm not going to worry about that. With "Bumper Crop," I don't have to water nearly as much as with other soils I've tried. Last year I was watering the pots at least five times a week. This year I am watering every five days or so. Less work is a plus, I guess. But I enjoy watering the plants---it gives me a chance to observe them. A lot of people panic if they see their plants wilting a little. Plants are supposed to wilt. It is their way of dealing with a dry spell. Of course, you don't want them to wither or get crispy, but wilting is nothing to worry about. It a little like when your kid says "I'm starving" and it's a half hour before lunch will be ready. No big deal.

So far, I'm happy with the



**potted peppers**

Tomatomania is about two months away, so mark your calendar for Saturday, September 10!





**Tomatomania 2015**