



Kevin Milaeger

# Milaeger's

## Autumn Vegetables

Kevin Milaeger

**I am usually anxious** for the brilliant colors of fall, but this year the warm weather persists, and I am content enjoying the few remaining warm days. My tomato plants are grateful for that too, as are other warm season vegetables. And the nights are cool enough to keep the cool season vegetables happy, so everything in the garden is copacetic. Well, not quite.

This year the tomato plants at my house have been respectable, but uneven in their performance. I would have to say that overall, production was down. On the plus side, plant health has been very good. No serious disease issues. In late



**Ananas Noire**

August, during a slump in production, I decided to try a boost of Algoflash liquid fertilizer (I prefer liquid for a fast jolt) and I am glad I did. The plants rebounded spectacularly (helped by September's glorious weather) and they are now all rich green in color, with new growth and more fruit. A few days ago I counted 21 fruits on one plant of 'Ananas Noire,' (aka 'Black Pineapple') and each was bigger than a baseball; some were twice as big. As you know, this is one of my favorite varieties, so I am very pleased about this performance. Here is a photo of it,



**Ananas Noire**

chopped and ready for the salad.

My favorite is still 'Brandy Boy,' the most flavorful large red (actually rather pink) tomato I know. I hold it in high regard despite the fact that it has not produced much in the second half of this season. I had over twenty large fruits in late July on my one plant, but I haven't picked anything from that plant for over a month. Maybe it wore itself out. It continues to look healthy, however, and now has some sizable green fruit.



**Big Bertha – no cage**

The pepper story at my home garden is a sad one. I planted large plants in early June. They

were already blooming heavily, and the forecast was for warm weather so I thought I was safe. However, a strong, cold wind that lasted a couple of



**Big Bertha - caged**

days ruined them for the season. I don't think the temperature dropped below fifty or so, but the chill along with the wind was too much for them. All the new growth was lost, and the plants never really put on any more growth after that. They were permanently stunted. Those of you who came to the garden soiree at our store trial garden last week know that the pepper plants there are another story. They look very good. I pick peppers nearly every day, and I have given many away. I put small cages (about 30" tall) around some of the plants, and I must tell you that from now on I will be recommending cages for all large and medium fruited pepper plants. Pepper plants are relatively brittle. The branches can snap easily so the cage is obviously a benefit. (Better than a stake, which offers support for the main stem, but not the side

branches.) Also, the cage keeps the fruit up off the ground so there is less spoilage. Lastly, by using cages you reduce the area that the plants require, so you can get more plants in the garden. I don't put cages on hot pepper plants because they are bushier, and have small fruit---but you might want to under certain conditions, such as high wind. One curious phenomenon occurred with the large, sweet variety 'Big Bertha.' You will see



**Ghost Pepper**



**Big Bertha**

in the photo that one is a large tapered bell pepper, with four lobes at the bottom and the other is tapered to a point---these fruits were picked off the same plant! Just one more unexplained occurrence in the garden---that's the sort of thing that keeps it interesting.

I put in radishes on September 1, and they are doing well. I guess I got carried away---planted six 20' rows. Radish seed is inexpensive, and I had fun planting the seeds and now watching the plants grow. For me, it is an entertainment bargain. I should be

able to start harvesting them in two weeks or so. I am growing five varieties---from the left, 'Watermelon,' 'China Rose,' 'White Icicle,' and 'Alpine.' In another area I have 'Cincinnati Market.' Unfortunately, the soil in that area seems unsuitable for radishes and that variety is faring poorly :(



Despite a few setbacks, growing your own food has so many rewards. The food just

tastes so much better. When I was out taking these photos I picked one of the big red bell peppers and ate it while I was doing the pics. It was succulent and superb, if I say so myself. Last evening when I was chopping up the nightly salad, I tasted a bit of the freshly picked cucumber, and that too was marvelous. If you haven't grown one, picked it at just the right time, and then tasted it, you won't know what I am talking about. The flavor far surpasses those in the grocery store, and even those in the farmer's market. Try growing your own food---it's easy!



***Radishes (one month)***