



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Spaghetti Squash

Kevin Milaeger

A recent trip to the grocery store proved to be an enlightening experience for me. Being a low carb guy, I have eschewed any type of pasta (for the most part,) and these days I enjoy Italian marinara sauce over spaghetti squash. Spaghetti squash is a winter squash, so designated because of its relatively hard shell and its storage capability (as opposed to soft skinned summer squash, such as zucchini.) I never thought much about the price of spaghetti squash because I don't buy it all that often. But last week I found myself at the grocery store checkout with three large squash and a bill of over \$33.00. The squash were maybe three or four pounds each, but still. I bought them anyway, figuring this was just the price of being a "low carb" guy.



Spaghetti Squash

The next day I was looking over the patch of spaghetti squash that I planted in our trial garden at Milaeger's. I've got about 18 clusters of plants, with three vines in each cluster. The plants are doing very well. It would be difficult to get an accurate count of the number of squash on the vines right now, but I think there are at least 40. As you know, I have been hand pollinating these for weeks now. The flowers are very small, compared to those of zucchini. But the pollination process is the same, and I enjoy my early morning visits to the garden. (Large commercial growers set up bee hives near their plants.) Right now I estimate the largest squash to be about 2-3 pounds. They are all growing rapidly, but it will be some time before harvest. The signs of





Spaghetti Squash - male flowers

maturity to look for are the browning and shriveling of the stem, and the shell getting harder. The "rule of thumb" is that if you can't cut into the skin with your thumbnail, the squash is ripe.

Spaghetti squash are related to pumpkins, another winter squash. Perhaps you have grown them, and know of their spreading ways. (Summer squash form a large bush, and don't travel around so

much.) Spaghetti squash behave the same as pumpkins, so this invasive characteristic is something you need to keep in mind when planning your garden. But I must say that given that we all have had our share of garden failures, it is gratifying to see such an exuberant plant.

Of course, it is just when this exuberance is at its peak when the dreaded squash vine borer appears. The final, and by far the most obvious, evidence of this pest is the sudden wilting of the vine. At that point, it is often too late to do anything. The first evidence of the problem is the presence of a flying insect that is black and orange in color, perhaps an inch and a half long. This curious creature is looking for a place to lay its eggs, usually on a lower part of the plant stem, or under the leaves. When the eggs hatch, the insect larva (think grub) appears and bores into the plant stem. This cuts off the nourishment to the vine; first it wilts, and then shrivels. Since I am out pollinating every morning, I keep some insecticidal soap with me so that I can spray these



Spaghetti Squash Bed

flying insects, should I happen to see any alighting on the plants. I won't get them all, but I can at least minimize my losses. I follow up by looking for the brown eggs. They are quite small, a little larger than a grain of coarse sea salt. But since they are brown they show up well against the bright green leaves and stems. Seek and destroy.

If your vine is just beginning to wilt, there is a chance you can save it. Follow the wilted vine back to the point where it is not wilting. Look closely

and you should see a hole in the stem, and the borer residing in the stem. Using a small, sharp knife, make a small incision in the stem, lengthwise, and remove the larva. Dig a shallow hole in the soil, directly underneath the injured part of the vine. Gently put the damaged part of the vine into the hole, and cover it with soil. Water well, and keep it moist for a few days. This is not a sure thing, but it is the best hope you have. I will play the "plant doctor" at this point and say the patient has a 50% chance of survival. More or less. The key is to recognize the problem early! If you don't, don't bother with the "surgery."



Tomato Ananas Noire

I guess this is starting to sound like growing squash is an awful lot of trouble. Not really, but if you grow it yourself you will better appreciate what farmers must go through to raise their crops. Now those \$11 squash don't seem quite so expensive. But still...

I've been picking tomatoes regularly now, keeping an eye on one plant in particular. My 'Ananas Noire' (aka 'Black Pineapple') plant is doing fine, but for the longest time it had just one fruit, though now a second has started to develop. The first fruit grew to an amazing size---I picked it on July 22 and it weighed 2.9 pounds. I don't believe I've ever grown a larger tomato.