



Kevin Milaeger

# Milaeger's

## Tomato Disease----What Can You Do?

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Those of you who have visited Milaeger's in spring know we have our regular selection of about 200 kinds of vegetable plants that we offer all season long, and also our "Vintage Veggie" (VV) section, which we offer for about ten days in mid-May. Our regular group doesn't change much--maybe 5% of the varieties are new in a given year. But our VV section is entirely new every year---sixty some varieties. Most of them are tomatoes, since that is by far our most popular vegetable. This year I plan to give special emphasis to disease resistant tomatoes, so I thought you'd like to know how that search is coming along.



Celebrity

In our regular category we are offering at least four that are known for disease resistance: 'Defiant,' 'Celebrity,'

*photo: ivygarth.com*



Goliath

'Legend,' and 'Goliath Hybrid.' For this year's VV section we are looking at quite a few that have that trait (we are especially concerned about blight.) We will field test them this summer, and you can do the same if you have disease concerns. We haven't finalized our choices yet, but in the running this year are 'Bella Rossa,' 'Iron Lady,' 'Mountain Magic,' 'Mountain Merit,' 'Old Brooks,' 'Rebekkah Allen,' 'Red Rose,' 'Rugged Boy,' 'Trust,' 'Ultimate Opener,' and 'Stone.' I'm not going to go over the characteristics of each of these (but they are all medium to large red tomatoes)---you can do an easy search, or you can check our site after we finalize

our list. (I'll provide a link in a future blog.) One thing I noticed about this group of plants is that four of these are determinate (bush) tomatoes. You will recall that means they are shorter (usually 36-48" tall), and bear for a shorter period of time, though they still might be heavy producers. Most of these are hybrids. A lot of today's breeding is being done with the larger farmer in mind, and they prefer determinate varieties. Disease can wipe out an entire crop, so disease resistance is a must for them. They also like easy harvesting---if they can harvest most everything with two or three pickings (sometimes only one)

*photo: ivygarth.com*



Bella Rossa

over the course of a few weeks, that would be much easier than picking continuously from July into October, as with indeterminate (vine) tomatoes. Also, smaller plants are much easier to

*photo: ivygarth.com*



**Mountain Magic**

seed for 100 years if the variety were disease prone? Just sayin... I think that if you keep a clean garden and follow a few simple rules, you will have pretty good luck with many of the heirlooms, too.

Tomato diseases can perhaps be likened to human maladies. Just because you followed your mother's instructions---Where's your hat?---Button up your coat!---Don't forget your boots!---Let me rub some Vick's on you!---and the like, doesn't mean you won't catch cold.

Likewise, the simple act of choosing a disease resistant variety doesn't mean you won't have disease problems. That's why they are called "resistant" instead of "proof." Even following some of the normal, good gardening practices won't make your garden disease proof. (By that I mean no watering late in the day or at night, prune bottom branches to

*photo: tomatogrowers.com*



**Trust**

manage---very little support, if any, is needed. All of these "benefits" come at a cost, as you might expect. Many tomato aficionados feel that flavor is compromised much of the time. I'm sure the hybridizers will argue that point, but we'll let you be the judge, and of course, all of our guests at Tomatomania can sample them all and draw their own conclusions.

Most, if not all, of these disease resistant types are modern hybrids. Some folks claim that the old heirloom varieties (those that have been saved by amateurs for many years, sometimes more than 100) are disease prone. I'm sure that some are. But why would you bother to save

*photo: tomatogrowers.com*



**Old Brooks**

improve air flow, keep a clean garden, rotate your crops, and other practices.) But you have to do as much as you can. If you have had disease problems, start with reliable varieties. Then practice good gardening practices, or I'll have to scold you like your mother used to.

Please email me ([kevin@milaegers.com](mailto:kevin@milaegers.com)) if you have any questions or comments.

