



**Kevin Milaeger**

*Milaeger's*

## Tomato Planting Date Inches Closer!

Kevin Milaeger

Once mid-May arrives, it's awfully hard to keep from planting things you should be waiting on---especially if the weather is pretty good. I spend some time tending the onions, radishes, peas, and greens that I planted earlier. But I am itching to plant the warm season plants, like tomatoes and peppers. To suppress the urge, I've been transplanting my tomato plants from 3" pots to 7" pots. Not only are the new pots more than twice as wide, but the soil volume is six times as great. In another day or two I'll stake the plants, and then move them to one of our cooler greenhouses, around the 60 degree range. I don't want them growing too fast. I'll do the same with my pepper plants, but I use a smaller pot, since they grow slower.

*photo: www.ivygarth.com*



**Bloody Butcher**

Once June arrives, I plan the outdoor planting date carefully. I only plant if the weather is warm, and the forecast must also be favorable. (Not that the weatherman will guarantee the forecast.) I don't want to set out the plants if we are expecting night temperatures to dip below fifty degrees, or if we are expecting windy weather. My tomatoes are in pots, sheltered from the north wind off Lake Michigan, but my peppers are in the ground, in a different area, and are exposed. Some years ago I planted the peppers early one June morning. When I got home that same evening the plants were stripped of their leaves from the day's windy onslaught. Lesson learned.



**Brandy Boy**

I've pared down my home tomato list. Not because I couldn't take care of them. I decided to grow them further apart, for more air circulation and direct light. We'll see if that

helps reduce disease and increases yield. Tried and true varieties that I am growing are 'Bloody Butcher,' to me the best tasting early tomato. 'Brandy Boy,' is a newer hybrid with an interesting heritage that includes the famous 'Brandywine' and 'Burpee Big Boy.' It is a pink slicing tomato, which means it is sweeter than most true



red or orangey tomatoes. 'Ananas Noire' is my favorite novelty tomato. It is a very large slicer, and has a tangy, rich flavor. Even when fully ripe the skin color is mostly mottled green, with irregular flecks of red. The interior is wildly colorful---various shades of green, accented with brilliant red markings. When you serve these sliced on a plate, they will dominate your table talk for at least a few minutes---and even longer, after your guests taste them. Another great novelty is 'Green Zebra.' It is streaked vertically with several shades of green.



**Ananas Noire**



**Druzba**

When ripe, some of the streaks turn golden yellow. It has a tangy flavor, and is a little bigger than a golf ball; I use it for salads. For a large red tomato I grow 'Wisconsin 55,' and 'Goliath.' The former has been a standard since the late 1940's, and 'Goliath' is a tasty modern hybrid with superb disease resistance. My favorite red cherry tomato is 'Sweet Baby Girl,' which is wonderfully sweet, and very prolific. We often get requests for "low acid" tomatoes, but every once in a while someone asks for "high acid." Some like the tang, but most often

they are using them for canning. One such variety is 'Druzba,' which I'll be trying this year---I want to taste how much acid is discernable. The rest of the tomato "garden" (the plants are all in 15 gallon pots) is devoted to varieties I haven't tried before. All were part of our Vintage Veggie program. A few that I am particularly intrigued with are 'Florentine Beauty,' a yellow tomato with a scalloped edge, and 'Giant Pink Belgium,' a pink beefsteak type that averages well over a pound. In the cherry category I'm going with 'Orange Paruche,' a yellow/orange variety that is super sweet. We offered it some years ago but then our seed source dried up. We were able to secure some his year so I'm looking forward to tasting that one again. I'm going to give 'Mr. Stripey' another chance. I grew it some years ago and it was not memorable. However, it is frequently found on lists of favorites of tomato aficionados everywhere. Maybe my taste buds need a tune-up. The same is true for 'Cherokee Purple.' It is praised everywhere, but our customers haven't responded well to it. I'm trying it again to see what the fuss is about. The others I am growing I have mentioned in previous blogs, so I won't repeat that information here. But you can find a list of our Vintage Veggie selection [at this link](#). We still have some of most varieties. My current personal list totals twenty-six plants, but I usually add a couple at the last minute. I just hope that's enough....



**Giant Pink Belgian**



**Orange Paruche**

You will recall my mentioning that, in January, we started a few tomatoes in the greenhouse just for fun. They are coming along nicely, over six feet tall now. The first to bear ripe fruit were

'Sun Sugar,' an ultra-sweet yellow cherry tomato, and 'Husky Cherry Red,' a popular determinate tomato that yields tons of golf ball sized red fruit. I ate one of each on May 16th, the first homegrown tomatoes of the season. 'Juliet' and the larger fruited 'Early Girl' are blushing, but are at least several sunny days away from picking. My favorite early tomato 'Bloody Butcher' is still green, and the fruit is much larger than their normal golf ball size. Some of them are twice that big. No explanation, like many things in life.



**Cherokee Purple**

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