

I hope you are starting to see some ripening tomatoes on your plants.

Before the 4th of July, I was able to pick a small amount of fruit from three different varieties. The first was 'Sun Sugar'---a cherry tomato that turns yellow/orange when it is fully ripe. The second was 'Sweet Baby Girl'---a sweet red cherry tomato. And I picked two fruits off of 'Bloody Butcher', an early red that is generally 2-3" wide. This last variety was the top vote getter at last year's tomato taste test---Tomatomania. 'Bloody Butcher' is normally very productive, too. I have



Bloody Butcher



Sweet Baby Girl

several additional varieties that are now starting to color up. About three weeks ago I checked some fairly large fruits of 'Kellogg's Breakfast' only to discover they had blossom end rot, so I picked them and tossed them on the compost pile. They were already over 3" wide, so that was a disappointment. If I have the time, I inspect fruit shortly after it forms to see if it has blossom end rot. That way I can discard it early---I'd rather have the plant put its energy toward producing good fruit. You can read more about the common problem known as "blossom end rot" in a [previous Tomato Talk](#).

We've had a few inquiries from customers about their tomato plants failing to set fruit. This problem has also been discussed in [Tomato Talk](#) but maybe I didn't stress it enough. Every tomato plant flower is capable of producing fruit. Pollination must take place to produce fruit, but there are some things that can prevent pollination from occurring. Extreme weather at the critical stage of flowering is the most common---excessively cold or hot temperature. Another is too much rain. In other words, the plant is stressed out because of environmental conditions. There is nothing you can do to prevent this. You need to wait until the next bloom cycle and hope the weather is better at that time. This is one reason I like to grow of wide range of varieties. They don't necessarily all bloom at once, so your risk is spread out. Also, some varieties are less affected by weather extremes than others.



Tomatoes are self pollinating. They do not need insects or wind to pollinate them. However, both of these factors are beneficial because they will help assure a heavy fruit set. There is also a spray product called "Blossom Set" which I haven't used but it is purchased by some gardeners every year. Hand pollination is tedious and not really practical. This year I hand pollinated a few because I wanted to make some deliberate crosses of different varieties. If the cross is successful I will extract the seed from the resulting fruit and grow them on next year to see what kind of fruit results. You never know what you might create.

Another subject that was discussed in a previous Tomato Talk was the determinate/indeterminate question. You will recall that determinate plants are short (usually 2-4') and indeterminate plants are tall and therefore require tall cages for support. But fruit yield is more important to me than the plant size difference. Determinate varieties tend to have one blossom set, and therefore one fruit yield that occurs over a few weeks. Indeterminate plants will produce fruit as long as the flowers continue---that is to say, until frost. Some gardeners are put off by the large size these plants can attain, and the fact that they need tall cages. Right now in mid July I have many plants that are already over six feet tall. This dilemma has not gone unnoticed in the tomato breeding world. Breeders are trying to create indeterminate plants that are short and easy to manage, yet they produce fruit over a long period. To achieve that goal while not sacrificing taste is the challenge. This year we are trialing three varieties that are reported to be indeterminate, yet short and fairly easy to manage. They are 'Sweet Chelsea,' a red cherry tomato---really more plum sized, if my plant is true ; 'Heartland Hybrid,' a red beefsteak type that has tasty fruit averaging 6-8 oz., and 'Moskvich,' an early red heirloom variety, reputedly with tastier fruit than most early types. We'll let you be the taste judge at Tomatomania.

At home I generally grow all indeterminate varieties, but this year I decided to try three determinates that were new to us: 'Argentina,' a large red cherry, 'Bonito Ojo,' with 6-8 oz. red fruits, and 'Siberian' (not to be confused with another variety---'Siberia'.) 'Siberian' is fairly small fruited, with red fruits about 2-3 oz. All these plants are 30" tall now and very bushy. I haven't picked fruit from any of them yet but I hope to within a week or so.

Please contact us with any comments or questions.

gardenquestions@milaeqers.com



Argentina