



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Tomatoes ----The Acid Test

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Customers routinely ask about low acid tomatoes. It's been a while since we talked about them, so I thought it would be good to review that topic.

Tomatoes vary in acidity, but not by much. Acidity is measured with the pH scale. The scale ranges from 0 to 14, with 7 being neutral, and the lower end of the scale being higher acid. Tomato pH ranges from 4.3 to 4.9, so there is not much difference in them. What varies much more than acidity is sugar content, and sugar masks acidity. Yellow and pink colored tomatoes are often higher in sugar, so folks think they are lower in acid.



Sweet Baby Girl

The sugar content also varies widely, and varieties with high sugar content are often very popular. Marketers know this so they like to put words such as sweet, sugar, and candy, in the name of a variety.

'Sweet Baby Girl,' 'Sun Sugar,' and 'Candyland' are well known examples. But, a sweet tomato does not guarantee lower acid.



Sun Sugar

With a pH range that is well below neutral, tomatoes are indeed acidic. But they are less acidic than many other fruits. Any citrus, for example, is very acidic. Most varieties of apples, pears, blueberries, cherries, raspberries, rhubarb and apricots are all more acidic than tomatoes. Many of these have lots of sugar, which masks their acidity, just like with tomatoes.

When folks refer to the "old fashioned tomato taste" they are often referring to varieties with higher acid content, but the balance between the sugar content and the acidity is what gives the tomato its flavor. We all perceive the balance differently. And the fruit can vary because of what soil it was grown in, when it was picked, how it was stored, and so on. Also, what foods we are eating with the tomato also affects our judgement. I don't like to dismiss any



variety (or praise it) based on one tasting. High acid tomatoes we are offering in 2017 are 'Old Brooks' and 'Ficarazzi.' The latter was offered as part of our Vintage Veggie offering, for a limited time. Both should be available for tasting at Tomatomania, on Saturday, September 9. The popular variety 'Early Girl' is also on the acidic side.



Ficarazzi

Although you can see that tomato acidity does not vary widely, there are small differences. Some of the lower acid types we are offering in 2017 include 'Lemon Boy,' 'Beefmaster,' 'San Marzano,' and 'Yellow Pear.'

photo: burpee.com



White Cherry

Every year I like to do an informal vegetable trial in our little garden at Milaeger's. The year the focus is on small yellow tomatoes. The trial will include eleven tomato varieties, some not quite yellow. I'm hoping our office staff will help me in the evaluation. I figure with about half a dozen people sampling over the summer, eventually we will reach some sort of consensus. I know that one's opinion of a variety can change from day to day, but I figure that after at least eight weeks of sampling, the best will eventually

shine.

The cherry types we are growing in the trial are 'Yellow Mini,' 'Sun Sugar,' and 'Sungold.' The latter two have been top vote getters at Tomatomania for years, and though they are both yellow, they turn orangey when they are fully ripe. I like to pick them as soon as they start to turn orange, to minimize cracking. A final cherry is 'Sweet 'n' Neat Yellow,' a true dwarf variety that is only 18" tall or so. Two non-yellow cherries that I also included are 'White Cherry' and 'Sungreen.' (It's my little project, so I can include whatever I want, right?) Grape shaped yellow tomatoes include 'Nova,' and 'Golden Sweet,' as well as two small, grape-shaped paste tomatoes called 'Golden Rave' and 'Golden Roma.' Lastly is 'Yellow Pear'---- always a favorite on our sales lot, but I predict it will be at or near the bottom of the taste test results. It is cute, though.



Sungreen