

Tomato and Cuke Growing Report



Sweet Baby Girl

Now that July has arrived I like to take some time to assess the progress of the tomato plants at my house. Overall, things are going well. All of the plants look healthy and have put on substantial growth. All have flowered and now carry fruit. My twenty plants are all growing in fifteen gallon plastic containers. I am growing only indeterminate varieties this year. The plants are caged to maximize production. I prefer the cages over stakes---I think it is less stressful for the plants, especially as the fruit becomes heavy.

Right now the plants range in height from about 50-70". They haven't put on a lot of bulk because I have been removing the axils. Axils (also known as suckers) are secondary growths that emerge between the main stem and the primary side shoots. According to many experts, the regular removal of axils will help an early

crop develop faster. I have been plucking out the axils fairly regularly, but I know a few have escaped my clippers. If I have missed some and they get rather large, I usually just let them go because I think their removal could be traumatic for the plant. After the first fruit is set, I usually let the axils develop.

I expect to pick my first fruit within a week, but there won't be enough to brag about. Right now it looks like the yellow cherry variety known as 'Sun Sugar' will be the first to ripen. This is the sweetest tomato we know of, with brix rating of 11. Classed as a yellow tomato, the fruit is actually more orange when fully ripe. 'Sun Sugar' has always been a favorite at Tomatomania, the tomato tasting event we hold every September.

In general, earlier bearing varieties have smaller fruit. I have never heard of a beefsteak tomato that ripens early, for example. However, I do have a couple of beefsteak types that already have fruit---I would guess they weigh around 12 ounces each---weight at maturity will be at least twice that. After the cherry types start, the "salad" varieties will start to color up. We like 'Bloody Butcher,' a well known early type that has superior flavor and color. It should be in full production by mid July.



Bloody Butcher



Tasty Jade

My cucumbers are doing well, too. This year I am growing a Japanese type called 'Tasty Jade'---a variety that has only female flowers, so it is usually more productive than traditional cukes. I have them planted in a plastic rectangular planter. I put in nine plants and I am training them up a metal arch. Growing them on some type of vertical support reduces the chance for disease and increases yield by about 20%. We have already eaten a couple of them (about 10" long) and there are plenty more in the offing. They can be eaten at any size. Once the cukes are ready for picking, it is important to keep on picking. If left on the vine too long the quality can suffer, and the future production can diminish. If you grow them on the ground, the fruits can be curled, coiled or twisted. If grown on a trellis, gravity will cause them to be straight, more or less. Cucumbers are a tropical plant, native to India, so I don't plant them until nighttime temperatures are reliably above 55 degrees. If planted

earlier, they have a tough time getting started. Once the cukes are picked, store them in the coolest spot you have, but avoid refrigeration---it adversely affects the flavor.