



Milaeger's

New Edibles in My Garden

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Though I am a big fan of tomatoes I am also curious

to try other plants that pique my interest. This year I am growing a number of varieties for the first time.

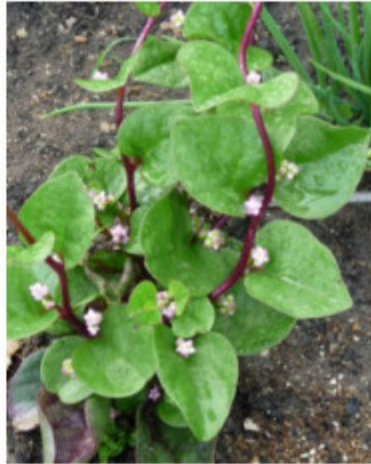


Basil 'Genovese'

Basil is a must in my garden. I need a ready supply for making my tomato and basil appetizer dish, which is always popular, especially with guests that have a bit of Italian blood in them. Basil is easy to grow, but you must remember a couple of things. Don't plant it too early. This is the single biggest basil problem I run into. Basil is one of the most cold sensitive plants we offer, so we don't recommend putting it outside permanently until night temperatures are above 60 degrees. The other thing to keep in mind is that you ought to remove basil flowers as they appear. This will ensure a longer season of usable leaves. I also like to plant new plants a couple of times over the summer.

I think this is the best way to ensure a constant supply of young, tasty leaves. I've read that many chefs favor the 'Genovese' basil, so I put in about five of them this year. In years past I planted a variety that was simply called 'Italian Large Leaf.' I'm not sure that my palate is refined enough to appreciate the subtleties recognized by chefs, but I'll follow their suggestion anyway. So far this season I've harvested quite a few handfuls of 'Genovese' basil and enjoyed my tasty recipe. [Click here for the recipe.](#)

New for me this year is the Malabar spinach, an ersatz spinach---really a "summer green." Most "greens" are cool weather plants. By the time the hot weather is with us, there is little or nothing left to harvest. Malabar spinach is from tropical India, the southwest coast, so it loves heat. Like the basil, it should not be planted until we have warm nights---about 60 degrees. I am growing the red stemmed version of this plant, botanically known as *Basella alba* 'Rubra.' I think this might make a good ornamental plant, but I have to see it through an entire season before



Malabar Spinach

making that judgment. Its small but plentiful pink flowers are charming, and so are its shiny, dark green leaves. This is a vine, twining its way up the support, as you can see in the photo. It reaches thirty feet in India, but I am not sure how far it will grow during our comparatively short growing season. During the current hot spell, I measured it's growth rate---it grew three inches in one 24 hour period. I have it growing on an eight foot tall freestanding trellis, and I am guessing the trellis may not be big enough. I haven't eaten any leaves yet, but it is supposedly used as you would spinach. I assume that



Malabar Spinach

means one could eat it raw or cooked. I'll check further before I sample it. This vitamin rich plant is used throughout Southeast Asia, China, and Africa in a variety of ways.



Okra 'Cajun Delight'

Okra is another new plant for me. I am growing a variety called 'Cajun Delight.' Okra is related to hibiscus, and it is as easy to grow as that familiar plant. In addition to its familiar culinary use, okra, like hibiscus, has distinctive ornamental value. The leaves, flowers, and plant stem are all appealing. There is a form that has reddish purple stems and leaves---something to keep in mind to try next year. Right now my plant (actually a cluster of three plants) is about 24" tall. Many fruits have already formed, and the lovely flowers mean that more fruit will follow. As with many plants, if you harvest the early fruit, the plant continues to bloom in the hope of reaching its goal of producing seed. This

is a good reason to harvest the early fruit when it is on the small side---it helps ensure more production and a lengthy harvest season.

Rutabaga is something I would probably not normally choose to grow, but sometimes things just happen. Last April I was in the supermarket, appraising the selection of spaghetti squash, when I noticed that the rutabaga roots, located next to the squash, were sprouting. The softball sized roots had small green leaves. I felt that I could get the root to grow again, so it went home with me. Later I discovered that the root was coated with wax, used as a growth inhibitor to increase shelf life. I carefully put a torch to the root and melted off the wax. I then potted it up and placed it in the greenhouse and a few weeks later it had roots. As it developed I noticed the leaves had a distinct similarity to those of broccoli---sure enough, it is a relative of broccoli, as well as turnips. I planted it in the garden toward the end of May, and it has put on substantial growth since then. Since the harvestable root was already formed when I planted it, I am not sure what to expect by this year's harvest time---I just enjoy growing something new.



Rutabaga



Eggplant 'Fairy Tale'

'Fairy Tale' is one of two eggplant that are new to the garden this year. It is a newer hybrid, reported to be sweet, and not bitter. This variety has long, slender fruit colored purple, streaked with ivory. They should be picked when they are from 4-6" long. Originating in India, all eggplant love hot weather and will not put on substantial growth until the ground heats up. Planting it early in an effort to get a head start on the season is unwise.

Recently I heard someone say they had set up an automatic watering system for their plants. They explained that they "would rather be out jogging than watering their plants." I understand that we have to

make the best use of our time, but to me watering is a very import task. While watering, I am constantly examining the plants, monitoring their progress, looking for problems, eating a cherry tomato or two----and with every watering, I am mentally comparing the plants to what I saw the last time I watered. Just recently when I was watering my lone artichoke plant I noticed that something about it didn't look right. I looked closer and could see it was sprinkled with black aphids. I sprayed it with insect soap and the next morning most of them were gone. With a watering system you probably wouldn't discover this problem until the aphids had sucked all the life out of the plant. Even with daily inspection you sometimes find a problem that you realize has been ongoing and you wonder how you could have missed it. After discovering the aphids, I took a closer look at all the surrounding plants and found no problems. Interesting how the insects selected the artichoke and ignored all the other plants---fussy eaters, maybe.