



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Garden Update--- the Cold Weather Experiment

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Now that the warm weather of June is approaching, it is time to plant the most cold-sensitive of the annual plants such as squash, cucumbers, eggplant, tomatoes, peppers, basil, and other plants of tropical origin. For us in southeast Wisconsin, the current weather forecast calls for another night (maybe two) of temperatures in the high 40's, but after that the nighttime low temperatures should be above 50 degrees. But of course there are no weather guarantees....

Patience is a necessary trait of gardeners. Once the plants or seeds are in the ground, we have no trouble waiting for the harvest. We might putter around the garden, finding things to do, all the while keeping an eye on garden progress, but we can wait. But in early



cucumber protected



tomato unprotected

spring, before it is time to plant, impatience rears its ugly head. You will recall that in my last blog I told you about my little experiment with the "Season Starter" product. This product is meant to reduce the risk for the impatient gardener who wants to start planting earlier than nature would normally allow. On May 13th I planted four plants each of tomato, pepper and cucumber. Two of each variety were protected with the "Season Starter" and two were left to the elements. We had a few nights in the high 30's after I started the experiment, so the results are

interesting. The unprotected cucumbers died---there is nothing left of them. The protected cucumbers are perfect, and they have put on significant new growth. I feel like a proud Papa! The tomato and pepper story is unfinished. Like the cucumbers, the protected tomato and pepper plants are



doing very well, as expected. The unprotected plants have survived, but when they will bear fruit is the real question. Let's start with the tomatoes. The stem of a young tomato plant should be the bright green color of celery, more or less. Instead, these stems are reddish purple, a sure sign of stunting. So while your first thought might be "Great---they made it!"



tomato protected

through the cold, a closer look shows that the plants will be significantly behind the protected plants, or any unprotected plants that are planted after the weather warms. I'll keep the unprotected plants in the garden and we'll see when they start to produce fruit. The peppers are a little harder to discern. The unprotected plants do look a little rough, from the cool temperatures and the wind, but their color remains good. We'll see how they progress. The protected pepper plants are downright lush---they are already blooming.



pepper unprotected



pepper protected

One of the phenological markers that I like to watch is the tree peony. We



tree peony

have several in the perennial garden here at the store. This year the first flower opened yesterday, May 28. Some years, the same plant was finished blooming by this date. I would say the plant growth timetable is behind average by at least a week. But it always seems like sooner or later, the season eventually gets back on the "normal" track.