



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

And Just When Things Were Looking So Good....

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I wish I had the answer. Three of my twenty tomato plants have been taken ill. They were perfect when I planted them about three weeks ago, and they have been treated lovingly since. I am not exactly sure what the problem is, or if there might be more than one problem, because the symptoms vary on the three plants. Years ago, when a plant in the greenhouse looked bad, and we weren't certain what the problem was, we'd say it had "the klunk." It seemed pretty apt back then, and today too, for that matter. The three plants that are affected are 'Bloody Butcher,' 'Green Zebra,' and 'Sweet Aperitif.' I would not have predicted that any of them would be a problem. 'Green Zebra' and 'Bloody Butcher' are the worst off. They have a pale, grayish green color and they have not put on any growth in



Tomato 'Green Zebra'

the last ten days or so. There are no pronounced spots on the leaves, but the stems are discolored and there is yellowing on the new leaves. It looks



Tomato 'Sweet Aperitif'

a little like a newer virus called yellow leaf curl; my leaves are yellow, but not curled. I am about ready to toss them. 'Sweet Aperitif' has some dark spots on the stem too, and some leaf spotting, so I am thinking early blight. I removed the spotted leaves and sprayed the remaining leaves again with copper fungicide. It looks a little better, I think---keeping my fingers crossed.

Sometimes when you make something in the kitchen, it doesn't quite work out as planned. You think you followed the recipe to a T, yet the outcome was iffy. Some recipes have a lot of room for creativity, others not so much. This is the case for some plants, too. I often tell people the "recipe" for success for a given plant; some plants have very specific requirements, and there is little room for error. I always thought that tomatoes were relatively easy; after all, pretty much every gardener is growing



at least a few of them. Of course, I've encountered problems in the past, but never this soon after planting. The perplexing part is trying to figure out if I did something wrong. I started with all new soil in my new pots, my plants appeared to be in excellent health, I planted at the right time, I fertilized, and I sprayed copper for disease prevention. Current wisdom is that blight disease (assuming it is correctly diagnosed) comes from diseased garden debris from the previous year. I



garlic scapes

I guess that is possible, but there is nothing remaining from last year that I can see. I'll keep an eye out for anything suspicious.



**bacon wrapped dates
with garlic scapes**

On the bright side, 85% of my tomatoes look great. I guess I should focus on them. After all, this is one of the reasons for growing a number of varieties---it guards you against complete failure.

The garlic plants are looking good. At Milaege's we sell both hardneck and softneck garlic. I grow the hardneck, but the softneck lasts longer after the harvest. At this time of year the hardneck garlic forms scapes at their tips. If you want larger garlic bulbs later in the season, you should cut off the

scapes. I cut off quite a few last weekend and added them to something I was fixing on the grill. It added a luscious new dimension to the flavor. The scapes make for an interesting presentation, too.

Of course I enjoy the ornamental side of gardening, too. One plant that is always a pleasant surprise is Prairie Smoke (*Geum triflorum*), a native prairie plant. The flower is not of much consequence, nor is the foliage. But the seed heads are spectacular. This is an early blooming plant, and the seed heads are in full display already in June. I took this photo at a garden in Door County about ten days ago. If the plant is positioned so that it is backlit, it would be even more stunning. Most people are unaware of this little gem, but it attracts attention in any garden. It grows to about 18" wide and 12-15" tall. It is very hardy and easy to grow in any sunny garden. Of course, the seed heads are eventually blown away, like those of a dandelion; true beauty is fleeting.



Prairie Smoke (*Geum triflorum*)