

January in the Greenhouse



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Last September, when the weather started to cool, I decided to move my pot of basil into one of our greenhouses for the winter. Usually I plant basil in the ground, but last year I grew it in a pot, so I thought it might be fun to see what happens. To my modest surprise, it's been thriving. So much so that I recently gave it a hard pruning, so that the plants will be stockier, not quite so flimsy. After the pruning, the three plants as a group are about 18" high and 24" wide. Mildew is sometimes a problem with basil, but so far that hasn't been a problem with this variety, called 'Dolce Fresca.' Fingers crossed. We've been offering mildew resistant varieties for years. "Resistant" is not a guarantee, but they're much better than the older types. I never gave it much thought before, but it turns out that basil turns into a woody plant as it ages, with stiff brown stems, like a little shrub. Every time I walk by my plant I rub the leaves and enjoy the scent, and I'm reminded of summer.



Basil “Dolce Fresca”

Last year my son, Dave, was growing a number of peppers at his house. All were in containers. Pepper plants are perennial, so I suggested he bring them in the greenhouse, too, just for fun. He brought them indoors in October, and they were still loaded with fruit. We harvested the fruit for a month or so, and then pruned the plants back sharply. Right now I would describe their condition as semi-dormant. They are green-stemmed, but lacking true leaves. But, new leaves are sprouting, so we're optimistic.



Semi Dormant Pepper Plant

Another winter greenhouse project is the starting of a few early tomato plants. We grow these not to sell the plants, but for the fruit. We offer it at our Farmer's Market, usually in early May. This year we started the seed on January 10th, a few weeks earlier than other years. They will be transplanted soon, and later moved up to fifteen gallon pots. We decided to change up the varieties a little this year. Some of the plants got too big and were unmanageable, so this year we chose shorter indeterminate varieties and some determinate ones. The varieties are 'Patio,' 'Little Bing,' 'Celebrity,' 'Husky Cherry Red,' and 'Early Girl Plus.' All are early varieties, so most of the fruit won't be real large, but 'Celebrity' will be the largest.



Two Week Old Tomato Seedlings

One of my favorite tasks every year is updating our "Greens to Grow" program. These are starter plants that will be available around April 1st. They are cold tolerant, edible greens that will tolerate our April weather. I go over last year's notes and review my observations meticulously. Despite my pleas to our customers, I get very little feedback so I have to rely on my own findings, and those of our staff. If you have comments, I'd like to hear from you.



Tomato “Husky Cherry Red”



Tomato “Celebrity”

This year’s G2G program has 46 varieties. Lettuce leads the way with twenty, then mustard with five. We’re growing one to three varieties each of arugula, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, Swiss chard, collard, endive, kale, kohlrabi, and spinach. Lots of fun stuff there. Among the lettuces, I especially like the red leaf types. We have several of them. They are flavorful and are the most nutritious of the lettuces. All are very easy to grow. But my favorite “greens” are the mustards. Their flavor varies in intensity, and all make a noteworthy, flavorful addition to a mixed salad. Your first reaction might be “Mustard? That sounds terrible.” But if you are a venturesome type, give it a try. Its not hot like many mustard condiments, just pungent. But the pungency dissipates quickly. It doesn’t linger like, say, a hot pepper. Add some zing to your salad. Sometimes, when I am on our sales lot, talking greens with a customer, I tell them to sample a snippet of the mustard. If they are willing, they usually end up taking some home to plant. But even if its not to your liking, enjoy the ornamental value of the plant in your garden. The red types are especially bold and gorgeous.

Please email me (kevin@milaegers.com) with your questions and comments!

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