



**Kevin Milaeger**

*Milaeger's*

## The Greens are Coming

Kevin Milaeger

**When I was growing up,** iceberg lettuce was the only kind of lettuce I knew. You can still find plenty of it photo: ivygarth.com

at the store, but leaf lettuce is what's hip now, and better yet, add some kale or arugula. I don't find the taste of iceberg to be bad, but it doesn't have any real flavor at all, does it? Mainly, it makes you feel good because you think you're eating something green, something healthy. But that's the trouble----when compared with other lettuces, iceberg lettuce falls short on nutrition. Of the lettuces that are readily available in stores, leaf lettuce is by far the most nutritious, and the darker the leaf,



**lettuce 'Australian Yellowleaf'**

the healthier it is----dark red/purple is the best. Adding kale and arugula to your salad is even better---they're even more nutritious than the dark lettuce. For me, the kale and arugula were both acquired tastes, because I

photo: ivygarth.com



**lettuce 'Cherokee'**

wasn't familiar with them while growing up, but I have come to love them both. So, my finished salad has maybe ten percent each of kale and arugula. They complement the other greenery nicely.

It's always fun to grow your own greens. And it's so easy I don't know why more gardeners don't do it. Much easier than, say, tomatoes. The end of March seems early, but the plants we are offering in our "Greens to Grow" program were all selected for their tolerance to cold weather. You can plant them at that time, whenever the weather is halfway decent and the forecast is favorable for at least a few days. By that I mean temps

above freezing and not too windy. That will give the plants a chance to get established before the next cold spell. Another method is to leave the plants in the pack that they came in, and bring them indoors if the weather turns bad. This will "harden off" the plants, *photo: ivygarth.com* making them more resilient to any future cold snaps after you plant them. It's best to get them planted as soon as you can, though. Last year I covered my plants for a few days when the temps went down to the low 20's, but I haven't had to do that for years. It's better to be on the safe side. I am always surprised at how soon you can actually start harvesting greens. It's always within three weeks of planting. I don't wait for a head to form, but you could if that's your preference. I pick only the outer leaves, so the plant continues to sprout new leaves from the center. The plants should continue to bear through May. If it's a cool Spring, maybe well into June. We'll have a large selection of greens ready by the end of March. [Here is a link](#) to a list of what we're growing this year.



**lettuce 'Nevada'**

*photo: ivygarth.com*



**kale 'Scarlet'**

When planning what you want to grow, it's wise to choose as many different greens as you can. There aren't any bad ones. They all mature at different rates, so a broad range ensures that there will always be something ready to pick. Most of the time there will be several varieties ready for harvest, and that makes for a more interesting salad. A blend of complex flavors. Then, when your guests ask what that scrumptious flavor is, you can say "That's Dinosaur Kale, I grew it myself."

One salad ingredient that has become crucial for me is mustard. I don't mean the condiment, I mean the plant. The mustard leaves provide a distinct bite that livens up a salad, makes it more adventuresome. The bite might be described as hot, but it's much different than the heat of a hot pepper. It's gone after a second or two, and doesn't linger in your mouth. You remember the flavor, not the heat. There are many different types of mustard. They come in various shades of green and red, and some are very frilly. They add color and decorative value, as well as the tangy element. Although mustard greens aren't all that hot, I think it best to cut it into small pieces so that is distributed throughout the salad---you don't want one of your guests chewing on one large leaf of mustard greens. That could be quite an adventure for the unsuspecting!

*photo: ivygarth.com*



**mustard 'Spicy Green'**

Please email me ([kevin@milaegers.com](mailto:kevin@milaegers.com)) if you have any questions or comments.

