



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Tomatoes---America's Favorite Vegetable!

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Tomatoes are technically a fruit, I know, but the USDA has declared that they should be regarded as a vegetable, so we don't need to spend time on that discussion. I'd much rather talk about what tomatoes I'm planning on growing this year. Like many www.johnnyseeds.com

of you, I've had problems with disease, so I want to do as much as possible to mitigate that problem. Check to see if the varieties you are considering are disease resistant. On many tomato labels you will see a series of letters that do not form a word, such as "VFN." This means the variety has been tested for resistance to various diseases, and has been found to be resistant to those indicated---in this example, verticillium wilt, fusarium, and nematodes. If



Cherokee Green

a plant label has no such letters, it does not mean it is not disease resistant. It just means that that variety has not been tested for disease resistance. www.johnnyseeds.com



Tomato seed companies need a financial incentive to do the testing. If a variety is open-pollinated, and seed can be saved by anyone, there is no incentive to undergo these expensive tests. But if a seed company is introducing a new variety that they alone offer, they do the testing, and then tout their variety's resistance. Many old favorites such as 'Brandywine' have never been tested. That variety is over a hundred years old, so I have to wonder why anyone would continue to save the seed of a variety that is prone to disease. This is why I feel most old varieties must be reasonably resistant. (Keep in mind



there are some diseases for which there really is no resistance.)

Tasmanian Chocolate

I always like to try a few new varieties. After all, nothing would ever improve if we weren't trying new things. I'm growing fewer plants these days, so the decision of what to grow is getting more critical. I used to grow about forty plants. That's a lot considering I don't do any canning or other preservation. This year I'll probably grow around fifteen plants. That's plenty for a two-person household.

Njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu



Ramapo

From Milaeger's [Vintage Veggie collection](#) (available mid-May only) I'm going to try 'Valentine,' a larger grape tomato that is highly touted by Johnny's Seed Company. Supposedly much better flavor and production than the popular 'Juliet.' 'Cherokee Green' also appeals to

me. I like the tangy flavor of most greenish tomatoes---we'll see how this one compares. 'Tasmanian Chocolate' also looks worthwhile. This is a beefsteak type, with dark colored fruit. It's a dwarf variety, so it's more

manageable if you are growing in containers, like me. 'Ramapo' is another favorite of mine. We offered it a couple years ago, and now again this year. It's a "Jersey" tomato, hybridized at Rutgers, which has a noteworthy reputation for producing great tomatoes. I'm very excited about another offering from Johnny's, a reintroduction of the original 'Wisconsin 55.' Although this is a hybrid from 1948, Johnny's says there are many strains these days, and they vary a lot. Johnny's has obtained seed directly from the University of Wisconsin, where the seed had been in cold storage for many



Bloody Butcher

years. I'm hoping this will be a return to that "old fashioned tomato flavor." We'll continue to offer the "other" 'Wisconsin 55,' for comparison.

From our regular tomato variety list, I am growing about eleven kinds. 'Bloody Butcher,' still, I think, the best early variety. 'Braveheart' and 'Jasper,' two excellent red cherry types. The former is a compact grower, so it's easy to manage. Of the standard, large, red/pink types, I'm growing 'Brandy Boy,' 'Chef's Choice Pink,' 'Buffalo Steak,' 'Ferris Wheel,' and 'Old Brooks.' The last one is very acidic so it's a good choice for canning. From the novelty colors, 'Ananas Noire,' 'Aunt Ruby's German Green,' and 'Green Zebra.' The list is subject to change, of course.



You will recall my last blog about planting Spring greens—lettuce, kale, mustard, and so on. One of my more stubborn readers reacted to that blog thusly: “You will never convince me about kale.” I can see where a kale



Jasper

salad might not be to everyone’s taste, but my recommendation was that kale would make up only ten percent of the greens in a salad. When you



Green Zebra

consider the other salad ingredients like tomatoes and peppers, the kale might actually be five percent or less of the total salad ingredients. Even if you didn’t like kale, I don’t think that small amount would ruin the salad for you. Another possibility why some dislike kale is that something was wrong with the kale. Not fresh, for example. Or, more likely, too mature. It’s supposed to be a little bitter,

but it can be overly so if it was picked too late. Also, maybe it’s just a matter of varietal selection---we all have our preferences. Once someone has decided they don’t like something, it’s hard to turn them around. But that doesn’t keep me from trying---I guess that makes me stubborn too.