



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Turn Off the News and Get in Your Garden

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These days, every time I watch the news for five minutes or more my blood pressure goes up a few points. At least it seems that way. I understand: wash your hands often, social distancing, stay home as much as possible, etc. Done. Click. Now go out in the garden for some fresh air, hoeing, planting, weeding, and planning this year's garden. That ritual does wonders for me.

"Feel good" experiences are a rarity these days. I had one over the weekend so I thought I'd share it with you—maybe it will make you feel good too. I was out in our "Expo" greenhouse, the big one behind our store. Right now we have cold hardy plants there—flowers and vegetables, along with seeds and related products. I saw a fellow near the seed racks with a few seed packets already in his hand. He looked a little overwhelmed, so we started talking. He was planning his first garden ever. I was glad he chose Milaeger's to get started. I began by telling him a critical date—April 27. That is the date of the average last frost in our area. You could round it off to May 1; it might be easier to remember, and it's even further on the safe side. If you get gardening advice from someone in the north,



Gold Rush lettuce



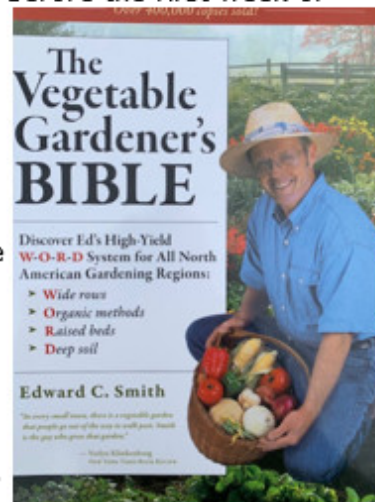
Red Kingdom mizuna

they often reference that date. The timing of most crops is determined with reference to that date. For example, you might say that you can sow radish seed three weeks before the last frost date, or, don't plant tomatoes for three or four weeks after the average last frost date, when all danger of frost is past. Knowing that date is a solid piece of information for any gardener.

I offered another solid tip. If you're planning on growing something you've never tried, do a quick search to find out where in the world it's from—that will give you critical information about how to treat it. The newbie asked me about cucumbers. I told him they were from India, a subtropical climate. Cucumbers need

heat—so don't plant cucumber seed or plants before the first week of June. Any earlier is a big risk. Not only do they not tolerate frost, they don't even tolerate night temperatures below fifty degrees.

After chatting it up a while longer, I recommended a book that I've turned to many times over the years—"The Vegetable Gardener's Bible" by Edward Smith. (Make sure you get the most recent edition.) Smith gardens in Maine, so the climate is not unlike our own. That's important because he understands the challenges of northern gardening. The new gardener wanted some quick instructions, but there are so many variables with every kind of plant, I felt he was better off with a northern-oriented reference



book that he could consult whenever a question arose. He shopped the greenhouse for a while and left with a cartful of plants and supplies, and the book, satisfied. And I was satisfied too, happy to help lead someone into the enjoyable world of gardening.



Scarlet kale

Immunity is in the news a lot right now. We all want greater immunity to ward off the next threat. Many vegetables are known to boost the immune system. But for many of them, the fruit will not be available for months. We need something faster. A quick search turned up a number of immunity boosting plants that you can begin to harvest soon. Broccoli, kale, spinach, and mustard greens are four that fall into this category. They're all available at Milaeager's now. You can begin harvesting the outer leaves of the last three about ten days after planting, so plant them now! Maybe you know someone with a weak immune system. These plants would make a nice gift for them. Or better yet, plant them in their garden for them. Or in a container that could be grown on a porch, for convenient harvest.

Now it's the first week of April. The weather is cool, but the forecast calls for night temperatures above freezing for the next ten days. I'm planting some greens in the little trial garden at our offices. ([Click here for video.](#)) This year's plant list includes some of the new lettuce varieties—

I'll plant them alongside some of the old types, to compare performance. Spinach, kale, and mustard greens will round out those that I'll plant from starter plants. Then I'll put in some onion sets and some radish seed. Root plants like radishes are best done from seed. You have to be careful not to sow the seed too thickly or you'll have a mess of tangled radish roots that won't be good for much. Be patient while you are doing it. Gardening is all about patience. Especially in these times, that is a virtue.

