



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Eat Food. Not Too Much. Mostly Greens.

Kevin Milaeger

So reads the subtitle of a book called "The Case for Food," by Michael Pollan, published in 2008. Most of the book is a critique of the so called "Western diet," comprised mainly of processed food. Pollan wants us to get away from processed foods, eating more "whole foods," and more greens. Lots more. He's pretty convincing. We're doing our part at Milaeger's, where we have been offering our ["Greens to Grow" program](#) for a number of years, in both Spring and Fall. In Spring these cold hardy plants can be planted as early as April 1. In our own test garden, we finally got around to planting them after the latest snowfall, and they are off to a good start.

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Butterhead Lettuce 'Yugoslavia Red'

It's a good idea to plant as wide a variety as your space allows. Everything grows at a different rate so if you plant a broad range of plants, there will always be at least several kinds that are ready for harvest. Your taste buds will appreciate the range of flavors. For me, lettuce is the most important green, especially the red leaf lettuces. After that comes mustard. If you aren't familiar with the flavor of mustard greens, you owe it to yourself to try them. Some say it adds heat to a salad, but I think its more accurate to say that it adds zest. If there is any heat, it's gone in a couple seconds, and it isn't very intense. I use a fairly small sample of mustard in my salads, no more than ten percent or so. I've had many compliments on it, even from folks whose usual diet isn't very



Mustard 'Friszy Lizzy'

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com

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adventuresome.

Spinach is another very desirable green, high in nutrients. We have several kinds this year and we are always looking for one that is "slow to bolt." This is a phrase that is used in all seed catalogs to describe varieties that come into bloom later, rather than earlier. When they bolt, the flavor of the green changes, and not in a good way. (This happens with lettuce and other plants too.)

This is why its good to get the plants in the ground early. They love the cool weather. You can start to harvest very quickly, probably less than two weeks after planting. We take notes every year, comparing when the spinach and lettuces bolt. Those with a short useful life are discontinued. Heat brings on the bolting, so if we have a warm spring, it shortens the season of these cool loving plants. Another feature worth noting in spinach varieties is the texture of the leaf. Some are very wrinkled, or savoyed. This doesn't affect the taste, as far as I know, but it makes the leaves harder to clean. Tiny pieces of soil can become lodged in the wrinkles, and you don't want that grit in your salad.

photo courtesy of ivygarth.com



Spinach 'Whale'

Of all the greens we grow, Swiss chard produces over the longest period. The heat of summer doesn't seem to cause it to bolt, at least not in normal weather. (Don't ask me what "normal" is.) In very hot weather it will peter out, but you can grow another crop in autumn. (We have fresh young plants available around September 1.) So, what is "Swiss" about Swiss chard? No one seems to know, and my reference books are far from definitive. We do know that chard is not from Switzerland, but from the Mediterranean region. It is among the most nutritious of all greens. The only bad thing about it is that it doesn't store well. You need to use it soon after picking. The rugged looking, puckered leaves are held mostly upright. They are best eaten when young. If you allow the leaves to get large, the stems can be tough, but you can always remove them. Certain varieties have very colorful stems, and some folks grow them as an ornamental plant. We grow a variety called 'Bright Lights,' and the stems are stunning shades of red, rose, yellow, or white. Try some chard and your salad will be more nutritious and tasty, and more colorful too.



Swiss Chard 'Bright Lights'

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