



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Time to Plant

For many of us, Memorial Day is the traditional planting day, the start of the main planting season. We've been planting cold tolerant plants since April 1st, but now the weather is getting reliable, and it seems everyone is ready to get outdoors. Especially this year. Memorial Day is a floating holiday nowadays, but when I was a kid it was always May 30th, no matter what day of the week. Maybe it's better this way, but I think May 30th is a more reliable planting date than May 25th, just sayin'.



tomatoes planted May 25th

The instructional tomato poster at Milaeger's says don't plant your tomatoes until night temperatures are above 50 degrees. I wrote that poster, and I know the advice is solid. Yet you probably remember that I refuse to be bullied by my own rules, so I went ahead and planted my tomatoes on Memorial Day morning. The weather forecast says nights in the high 40's this coming weekend. My plants are up close to the house, at least, and out of the wind, so I'm not going to fret about it.



Bloody Butcher

I'm amazed by the number of folks, even experienced gardeners, who think that after Memorial Day, anything can be planted all at once. That would be like planning Thanksgiving dinner, and deciding to cook everything for the same amount of time, at the same temperature. You need to use your head a little. We've already discussed tomatoes and their needs. What about peppers? They, too, come from a subtropical part of the world, so

they must have heat. But even when our air is fairly warm, the soil might

not be. Particularly if your garden gets some shade, or maybe you just had a cool rain. Get yourself a soil thermometer. For peppers, the preferred soil temperature is 65 degrees. If planted too early, the plants can become stunted. And if damaged by a late frost, or even a near-frost, the plants can be more disease prone. Do yourself a favor, and plant at the right time. I know, you are worried about getting the varieties of plants you want, so you buy early. Okay, but leave your peppers outside only if the weather is favorable. Otherwise, bring them in at night. I tell customers to use a cart or a wagon; it's easier on the back, and you're more likely to move the plants when needed.



Chef's Choice Pink

These same planting date rules apply to the next three top sellers on our vegetable lot—cucumbers, eggplant, and squash. Again, all are from tropical

photo: ivygarth.com



Rose

or subtropical climates and will pout if they are exposed to cool temperatures, especially if it's windy. They might even die. I've looked at many photos of plants that were planted too early. The gardener's seemed to have no idea they had planted too early.

At Milaegeer's we offer over 80 kinds of tomatoes all season long, and during our Vintage Veggie promotion (ending soon) we offer an additional thirty or so. With a broad selection like that, it's understandable that new gardeners especially have trouble deciding what to grow. They often ask me what I recommend. I'm happy to answer, but we

all have different taste buds, so be advised. Here's what I'm planting at my place this year. I'm growing only one early tomato and that's 'Bloody

Butcher.' It's a little bigger than a golf ball, and ripens about 55 days after planting. It's flesh is blood red, and it's the tastiest early tomato I've found. (Next year I'm planning on trialing a number of new early varieties for a comparison test.) In the large red/pink category I am growing the following: 'Brandy Man,' a newer pinkish hybrid, 'Buffalo Steak,' a wonderful scarlet beefsteak, 'Chef's Choice Pink,' another newish pink variety that has outstanding sweet flavor, 'Old Brooks,' a good sized red that is more acidic than most. It has that bitey tomato flavor. Others include 'Red Rose,' new for me this year. It's a hybrid



Ananas Noire



with terrific tomato lineage (Brandywine x Rutgers). I'm also growing 'Rose', a large, sweet, pink slicer, 'Wisconsin 55,' a local favorite since the 40's, and 'Classic Beefsteak,' an heirloom beefsteak, to compare with the many other beefsteaks. I'm only growing one novelty, 'Ananas



Sun Sugar

Noire,' my favorite in that category. It's very tasty, with a certain sharpness. It's colorful, and it's prolific, and every person I've recommended it to loves it. Two cherry tomatoes are also included. I like to snack on them when I'm outside, but I especially enjoy watching my granddaughter Lucy eat them. Not a lot of two year olds like tomatoes. 'Sun Sugar,' usually considered to be a yellow variety, it

actually turns fairly orange when fully ripe, and it's ultra-sweet. And 'Rapunzel,' with huge trusses of sweet, red, cherry sized fruit. Both of these cherries start bearing around the time that 'Bloody Butcher' does—usually the second week of July. The others I'm growing will start bearing about 70-75 days after planting. To the some it seems like a long way off. Maybe it is, but good things take time. Think of it as delayed gratification. Much of the joy is in tending the plants, and watching them grow—it's called gardening. For new gardeners, the sooner they understand that, the better.



Rapunzel

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