



**Kevin Milaeger**

*Milaeger's*

## **The End of the Season**

**The seasons come and go so fast**, don't they? Now another is quickly ending. Our average first frost is October 17. That's the date for the official weather site at Milwaukee's Mitchell Field. If you live close to Lake Michigan it could be considerably later, and if you live west of I-94 it would be earlier. A few things are still happening in our garden. Although it's been cool, the small raspberry patch has been producing a bowl of fruit about twice a week. This is the variety called 'Heritage' (Milaeger's best seller) and even though I know it bears twice every year, I'm always a little surprised and delighted when the fall fruit appears. Some years the autumn fruit is very small but this year the berries are nice and fat. I've had no frost at my place yet, so I'm hoping I can pick berries into November.

A few tomatoes remain on my straggly plants. The fruit looks good but they no longer have the taste they had in August. Warm temperatures are needed to get true tomato taste. So much of our recent weather has been in the high thirties and forties that the



**raspberries**



**Heritage raspberries**

current fruit isn't that far from the winter fruit at the grocery store. Can't do much about that. We're always looking for better cherry tomatoes, because they're so popular. Most people probably don't realize it, but ounce for ounce, they have many more vitamins than large tomatoes. Plus, sometimes kids won't eat tomatoes, except for the cherries, so that can be a good way for them to get some nutrition. 'Artemis' was one of the new ones we tried this year. It has some interesting characteristics. It is indeterminate, but a very short grower. Our plant was no more than 30" tall. The fruit was smaller than most cherries, but sweet. The unusual feature is the skin, which was either very thick or very firm, or both, so they hardly ever crack. We're not yet sure if we'll offer it next year. Another new one is 'Pink

Champagne.' Also on the short side, it grew to about 48", but bore fruit all summer. This plant had pinkish, grape shaped fruit. It wasn't overly sweet, so I think we will not be adding it to our list for next year. The last red one we grew got to be quite tall, well over 72" and bore fruit all season. This was 'Rapunzel.' It's fairly crack resistant, even though its skin was normal, and not at all tough. We've been growing this one for a couple years, and we plan to have it next year, too. The last cherry we grew was 'Sun Sugar.' This one is always a delight because of its sweetness and it didn't disappoint. Although I like this one a lot, if I could only grow one cherry tomato it would not be this one. Even though it's fun to eat, it lacks that tomatoey flavor that red fruited types have, and what tomato lovers crave. We've been growing 'Sun Sugar' for many years and it's the favorite of many, so we'll be offering



**Fatali pepper**

it as long as we can get the seed.



**October radish harvest**

The peppers still taste good, and the plants have held up pretty well. There isn't much fruit left, but what there is tastes great. I don't eat the hot peppers, but I like to grow them. When the fruit changes to their final color, they are really beautiful. Hot pepper plants generally need a very long season. And a hot summer helps them mature earlier. This year we had a few hot days, but no long hot spells that I remember. So my first fruits on 'Fatali' finally matured in mid September. It's possible to dig up your plants and grow them indoors, but with little sun in the cold months, supplemental light would be a good idea. Maybe I'll dig one up and try it in one of our greenhouses, just for fun.

You may recall that my first late season crop of radishes failed. I think it was due to a couple of very hot days in August, but that's just a hunch. When I realized they weren't going to grow properly, I scuttled them with a hoe and planted a second batch of seed. I pulled the first radishes last week, about five weeks after planting the seeds. I made sure I watered them at least three times a week, which is important for radish success. I thinned out the seedlings about a week after they sprouted, but I should have removed even more seedlings. Some of the plants are having trouble maturing because they're too crowded. After all these years, you'd think by now I would have learned that lesson.

I planted the fall lettuce crop around September 1st, and we've been harvesting leaves for several weeks now. I prefer to pick the outer



**volunteer squash 1**



**volunteer squash 2**

leaves so the plant will continue to produce. Some folks allow the plant to reach full size and then harvest it. What you do will depend on which varieties you grow, and your personal harvest preference.

One surprise in the garden was a couple of squash that were maybe planted by a squirrel. They germinated very late, probably July, and so didn't bear until late. At season's end the larger fruit is about the size of a soccer ball. It's still green, with beautiful markings. The smaller one will probably not fully develop. These should be picked when the stems turn brown and start to shrivel. Sometimes these serendipitous happenings are what make gardening so much fun.

Please email me ([kevin@milaegers.com](mailto:kevin@milaegers.com)) with your questions and comments!