



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Remember: Every Tomato Variety is Someone's Favorite

Kevin Milaeger

Reviewing the Tomatomania taste test results is always interesting. Those of you who have experienced our event know that the test method is casual, not scientific. We have no control over how many varieties you sample, we always run out of some varieties, and some fruit may be a little under or over ripe. We do the best we can, and the main goal is to have fun, anyway. The surprise winner in the large fruited category was 'Aunt Ruby's German Green.'



Aunt Ruby's German Green



Aunt Ruby's German Green

This one was not even in our regular offering of tomato plants in spring. It was available only in our "Vintage Veggie" collection for a short time in mid-May. We tried it some years ago with mixed results but I wanted to try it again because it turns up on so many "favorite tomato" lists. I've also heard it praised by a number of chefs. I believe this is the first time that a large "novelty" tomato has been voted number one. When fully ripe, it is pretty

much a green tomato, with a little yellowing on the shoulders. The flavor is rich, with considerable tang.

After our internal review of this year's Tomatomania we determined that we have to grow more cherry tomatoes for next year. We ran out of almost all of them way too soon. The exception was a variety called 'Ketchup and Fries.' This is a grafted plant, producing tomatoes on top, and potatoes underground. (These two plants are related, otherwise it would not be possible.) Since we had plenty of fruit of this variety, it was the winner in the cherry tomato class (and #1 overall), but we believe the results were skewed because of the high production, and the



Sun Sugar

low production of other cherry tomatoes. That isn't to say that 'Ketchup and Fries' doesn't taste good, it just means there wasn't much competition this year. 'Sun Sugar,' an orange-yellow cherry, was close behind the winner---it scores well every year. In the large red tomato category (the most important in terms of plant sales), 'Brandywine Red' was the victor. I've never grown that one at home, so now I added it to my list for next year. You can see all the Tomatomania results [here](#) (cumulative or by [category](#)). I think the best way to assess the results is by category, rather than the overall standing. You really can't compare a cherry tomato to a large red tomato to a paste



Ketchup and Fries

tomato, I don't think. But we all have different taste buds. I always keep in mind my tomato maxim: Every tomato variety is someone's favorite.

In my home garden, at least, this has been a trying year for tomatoes. Some of you have written to me about your troubles, too. Occasionally a very frustrated gardener tells me they are ready to give up growing, after one setback or another. With that thought in mind, I'd like to share a conversation I had at Tomatomania back in September. I was chatting with a man I have known casually for a number of years. He always delights in telling me his age---ninety-four this time. He was sampling tomatoes because he was looking forward to trying something new next year. From that, I took it that he wasn't happy with the current year either. I liked his resolve not to stop growing just because he had an off year. We should all learn from that.



Brandywine Red

I was walking amongst the tomatoes at my house the other day when I saw what I thought was a large green tomato on a cherry tomato plant. A closer look revealed that it was not a tomato at all, but a walnut. A squirrel must have carried it into my garden and tucked it in the plant, about five feet off the ground. The nearest walnut tree that I know of is about 500 yards away. Not sure why the squirrel thought that was a good location for storing the walnut. So far that's the only walnut that I've found, so maybe the squirrel has since found a better storage spot.



walnut

My pumpkin project turned out pretty well, considering how late they were planted, and this year's cool temperatures. My largest pumpkin weighed 117 pounds when we picked it in September. It seemed to have stopped growing by then. It didn't have the traditional pumpkin shape, but that's okay with me. There were a couple other big ones,

and about 25 smaller pumpkins that were all about the size of a football. Some competitive pumpkin growers leave just one fruit on a vine so that all the energy is directed toward one fruit, resulting in larger fruit. I might try that next year, just for fun. A hotter summer would help, too. We'll see what next year brings. Hope springs eternal in the human breast.



117lb. pumpkin

Please email me (kevin@milaegers.com) if you have any questions or comments.





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