

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

9/15/2010

16 Ways to Say Tomato

Chris Beytes



Saturday, September 11, was Tomatomania at Milaeger's in Racine, Wisconsin. Now in its eighth year, Milaeger's Tomatomania is about all things tomato, from a tasting of 116 different tomato varieties and loads of assorted salsa to Bloody Marys (they have a liquor license) and even Kevin Milaeger's tomato-themed shirt (which he found on eBay). They estimated the crowd for the day at around 800.

Kevin was busy working the salsa station, so we caught up with his sister, Kris Reisdorf, to ask her why they do it.

"We want to do the best for the gardener," she replied. "And the best thing is to make them aware of how many [tomato]

varieties are actually out there and what they taste like. This way, they can keep their [variety] guides, and when they come back next year they can say, 'this is the one I like.' And any that aren't popular, we drop from our variety list."

The tomatoes for the tasting come from about 200 plants growing in large tubs in their Cravo house. Milaeger's sells the fruit to a local restaurant (which repays the favor by cooking fresh tomato-based food samples during Tomatomania). "It's supposed to be a profit center. Whether it is or not, I don't know," says Kris with a laugh. It does fit with the company's history: hothouse tomatoes were the very first commercial crop her parents grew around 1960.

We asked Kris if there have been any runaway favorites over the years.

"I'd say the top ones are Sun Sugar and Sun Gold," she answered. "Those two vie for first and second place. People just love the sugar content in those." **GT**

Editor's note: To see a slideshow of Tomatomania, go to <http://tinyurl.com/2c2fcvk>.