

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

We know that spring has finally arrived because the bulbs are flowering and the trees are beginning to bud.

Every day the leaves on the trees are opening more and the landscape is covered in various shades of light green. Although temperatures are rising during the day, nighttime temperatures can still be quite low. Gardeners are being advised to wait until after Victoria Day weekend to plant their gardens.

Our farmers are telling us that crops will be about two weeks late this year. For example, there was no rhubarb or asparagus available at the Market for the first two market days of this season, but both were available at this time last year.

The ground is still cold from the deep frost of the particularly cold winter. We will all have to show patience and understand that our farmers are at the mercy of Mother Nature.

Although slightly delayed this year, planting time is just around the corner. Therefore I'm going to remind people that the Wiedemeyers are at the Market in May and June only with their wonderful selection of heirloom tomato and pepper plants, heirloom seeds, herbs and flowering vines. Their heirloom plants are in high demand and tend to sell out, so don't delay if you would like some for your garden.

Heirloom tomato plants are plants whose seeds have been handed down through families and friends for many generations. They have survived the test of time to bring back that old-fashioned great tomato flavour.

All of the plants that the Wiedemeyers offer have been organically grown and come from seeds that have not been artificially hybridized or genetically engineered. Unlike hybrids, heirlooms are open pollinated and, thus, can reproduce true to form year after year. By growing heirloom vegetable plants, we can help to maintain the diversity of our food crops for future generations.

Breaking down the tomatoes by size, we begin with the cherry varieties. Yellow pear is a small yellow pear-shaped tomato that was introduced to North American settlers in the 1700s. They are wonderful for salads.

Black Cherry produces dusky dark fruit that is bursting with flavour. Enjoy the prolific red fruit of the Mexican Midget. The well-known Tiny Tim is a small plant and, as such, will grow well in containers for those short on space.

In the medium-sized category, Black Japanese Pear is a rare heirloom that produces high yields of dark red, pear-shaped fruit. Black Plum is a wonderful, rich-tasting tomato from Russia. Glacier will produce delicious orange-red fruit throughout the summer (I am very partial to the flavour of orange tomatoes). Try the Eva Purple Ball from Germany with its great tolerance for different weather conditions. The Gold Medal bicolour tomato was voted the 'sweetest tomato you ever tasted' in Seed Savers tomato tasting contest.

In the beefsteak-sized category, the Amish Red Brandywine has been a favourite for centuries, loved for its flavour. The Cherokee Purple is an exquisite tasting tomato developed by the Cherokee Indians. Dester is a luscious pink tomato that won the Seed Savers Tomato Tasting Contest in 2011. Hungarian Heart originated in Hungary over 100 years ago and is delicious.

Turning to sweet peppers, varieties like King of the North, Sweet Chocolate and Napoleon Sweet come in a rainbow of colours.

Aurora is a beautiful plant that produces colourful, ornamental peppers. If you are brave, try growing some of the hottest peppers in the world such as Scotch Bonnet or Ghost Pepper.

This is just a small sampling of the many rare varieties of heirlooms that the Wiedemeyers grow. I encourage you to visit them at the Market to select the ones that appeal to you and to have your questions answered by experts. They are at the Market only until the end of June.

Last Saturday at the Market, two more of our farmers arrived along with two new food vendors with Mexican and Indian food. As the weather improves and the farmers' spring crops become ready to harvest, more vendors will arrive, and the farmers' tables will begin to fill with such things as asparagus, rhubarb, lettuce, garlic scapes and fiddleheads.

Also, we have a new French bakery joining us this year, and we're very excited to have them become part of our Market family.

See you at the Market!