

Common Tomato Problems

Growing tomatoes in Oklahoma can be both rewarding and challenging. Long growing seasons and lots of sunshine make Oklahoma ideal for bountiful tomato harvests. However, unpredictable spring and summer rainfall, hot summer temperatures, and pests can present challenges to Oklahoma tomato growers. Once you have planted your tomatoes and are waiting for your first fruit to ripen in June, there are a few things to remember about growing tomatoes here.

First, tomatoes require at least one inch of water a week, possibly more if it is hot and dry. The soil should be watered once or twice a week to a depth of around 12 to 18 inches. Tomatoes that are underwatered could wilt and this could impact production.

Second, tomatoes do NOT get a deep red color in temperatures over 86° F, so pick them when they are pink and let them change color indoors where it is cooler. You should pick them twice a week in warm weather.

The following are a few common tomato problems faced by Oklahoma gardeners:

1. The end of my tomatoes are black on the bottom! - This is likely Blossom End Rot which develops due to lack of moisture during fruit formation. Too much or too little water causes the tomato plant to not absorb as much water, thus limiting the amount of calcium available for good development in the young fruit. Water plants uniformly and make sure to mulch around your tomatoes to ensure they do not dry out easily.
2. I don't have any tomatoes! – It may be that the temperatures are either too hot or too cold for fruit to set. Tomatoes do not set fruit when the temperature at night is below 60° F or above 70°F or when the temperature during the day is consistently above 92°F. That is why in the heat of July

and August you typically will not get tomatoes but will get more fruit forming during autumn when the temperatures cool again.

3. All the leaves on the bottom of my tomato bush turned crunchy yellow and are starting to fall off! This may be caused by fungi such as Early Blight. This usually occurs in older leaves closer in contact with the soil. It may start with small yellow spots on the leaves that turn black or brown and your tomato may lose its leaves. Try not to spray leaves directly with water; use drip lines or soaker hoses to water instead. There are several Fungicides available at most garden centers that likely would help.

4. I came out this morning and my tomato has no leaves! Tomato Horn Worms may have helped themselves to your best tomato plant. These big, fat, green, guys are easily identified by the long “horn” at the end of their abdomen. Your best bet is to squish them, or have one of your kids do it if you are squeamish about squishing stuff.

5. The roots of my tomatoes have knobs all over them! Root Knot Nematodes may be the culprit. Nematodes live in the soil and infect the roots of tomato plants. Getting rid of Nematodes may be difficult. It is recommended that you rotate your crop and don't plant tomatoes the same place in the garden you did the year before. You can plant corn or onions where you planted tomatoes last year instead. Roots of infested plants should be removed and burned or buried in a landfill. Clean your shovels and other garden utensils after digging in infested soil. You can also use soil solarization (refer to OSU Fact Sheet [EPP-7640](#))

These are just a few of the many diseases and surface pests that can inflict damage on tomato plants. For more information on common tomato problems please refer to OSU Fact Sheets:

[HLA-6012](#) (Growing Tomatoes in the Home Garden)

[EPP-7625](#) (Common Diseases of Tomatoes Part 1: Diseases Caused by Fungi)

[EPP-7626](#) (Common Diseases of Tomatoes, Part II, Diseases Caused by Bacteria, Viruses, and Nematodes)

[EPP-7627](#) (Common Diseases of Tomatoes, Part III, Non-Infectious Diseases)