

Tomato Problems and Diseases

Is there anything better than a ripe, juicy, homegrown tomato? Absolutely nothing unless that tomato winds up on a BLT!

It seems that many of us think tomatoes grow easily: not much effort, just buy the plants, water occasionally, then sit back and wait for the harvest. Tomato lovers everywhere wish it were that easy, but the truth is tomatoes may be among the more complex plants to get right. We find that there can be many problems with tomatoes: pests, diseases, and soil/nutrient issues. Often, these issues can have similar symptoms, or the symptoms may be confused.

Some of the issues presented will be encountered at one time or another, but don't let this keep you from planting. Instead, follow some simple, sound and proven gardening principles:

- 1) **SOIL TEST:** Start with a soil test. Nutrients are important for the plant itself, but calcium is also necessary to help build a sturdy cell wall to provide healthy fruit. The test will indicate the pH of the soil, which needs to be right to allow absorption of various nutrients such as calcium.
- 2) **COMPOST:** Amend your bed with organic material to add nutrients and to promote good drainage. Use compost from your compost pile. Mix it in to about a 6-inch depth.
- 3) **MULCH:** This will do several things: shade the roots when the weather is hot, minimize weeds, and maintain a proper moisture level to keep plants from drying out between watering – very important! This wet/dry cycle can cause Tomato Split. It also looks nice.

Temperature can stress a plant. If planted too early or too late, the plant may stress and not produce fruit. While our last frost date has clearly passed (April 15th on average), hot temperatures will be here before we know it. Tomato plants do NOT like our hot summers.

Lack of water can also stress a tomato plant. During the hottest months, it's best to give the plants a deep watering at least once a week rather than a daily surface sprinkle. The water needs to reach deep into the root system. Water early in the day and only to the soil – keep water off the foliage. Mulching is a big plus as it helps to maintain constant soil moisture and keeps water from splashing up on leaves which will spread disease.

A lot of information is available on tomato problems – way too much to deliver here. The best way to know for sure what is going on with your tomatoes is to read the OSU fact sheets that are available on line, as follows, or at the Tulsa County Extension Office.

<http://factsheets.okstate.edu/documents/hla-6012-growing-tomatoes-in-the-home-garden-2/>

<http://factsheets.okstate.edu/documents/epp-7625-common-diseases-of-tomatoes-part-i-diseases-caused-by-fungi/>

<http://factsheets.okstate.edu/documents/epp-7626-common-diseases-of-tomatoes-part-ii-diseases-caused-by-bacteria-viruses-and-nematodes-2/>

<http://factsheets.okstate.edu/documents/epp-7627-common-diseases-of-tomatoes-part-iii-non-infectious-diseases/>