

Sarah Denkler
Horticulture Specialist
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Problem Tomato

While some have been discouraged by the late seasonal start on summer vegetables others have pushed on and have plants that are growing, blooming or producing fruit. As in any year tomato plants can have a host of issues that will alter their growth cycle. Take a look at some of the more common issues.

Many times tomato will bloom like crazy but refuse to produce fruit. Fruit set occurs when temperatures are below 85°F so lack of fruit can be due to high temperatures, too much nitrogen or poor pollination. While it is frustrating to see blooms and no fruit, often patience will result in a harvest.

Septoria is the most common disease of tomato. While it can be a challenge to avoid getting septoria, some easy practices can help to prevent it.

Place a cover on the ground around your tomato plants of straw or newspaper. This will also prevent weeds from growing. Remove lower leaves from the plant if they start to yellow or show small brown spots. Water the ground and not on the leaves or the stem. If you have had septoria fungus in the past and believe you will get it again you can use a home garden spray with 29% of the active ingredient chlorothalonil. One trade name is Ortho Max Garden Disease Control. As always, rotating the crops to different locations in the garden will help to lower the spread of disease.

Aphids are an excellent example of “it’s just a matter of time before” they are around. By now they have been around the area for over a month. Now that temperatures are in the upper 80’s and 90’s you will see plants with yellow specks on the leaves or you may notice plants drooping. Many times this droop will be concentrated on one stem or at the top of the plant. Once you water the plant it will perk up but you may have the same scenario again the next day. The cause for this is likely aphids. If you examine the plant you may see the tiny fat bodied green or clear aphids that hide under the leaf or in the angles of the stem. They are usually are hard to find. If you have aphids you can spray with liquid carbaryl making sure to get the underside of the leaf and the stems. You may have a high population of lady bugs that are feeding on the aphids so you may want to hold off on spraying but you will have to make sure that your plants are given plenty of water to adapt to the feeding habits of the aphids.

Mites can also affect plants in the same fashion however; they are so small that you will not be able to see them. If you shake the plant over a white sheet of paper you may be able to see tiny dots moving around. This can help confirm a mite infestation.

When plants begin to wilt but don’t bounce back after they are watered then there may be something more serious going on. Possibilities include nematode infection or one of several blights. In both cases the plants will wilt, turn yellow then brown as the plant dries out and dies. Watering may help the plant bounce back one time but often it does not help the healthy, green color return. Once the plant is beyond hope you can do two things to check for problems.

Pull the plant out, roots and all and inspect the roots for small swollen areas on the root. These swollen areas may be oblong or round. If you see these then you have a nematode infestation. If you plant again in this area of the garden you should avoid cucurbits, potato or tomato as they will all be infected by nematode.

If there are no indications of infection by nematode then you will want to check for blight. Cut the stem of the plant at an angle and look for discoloration of the stem. Brown or black areas indicate that the vascular tissue has been clogged and this prevents nutrients and water from moving through the plant. These can be caused by bacteria or fungi and results in what we commonly call blight. You can also cut the skin of the stem off to check for such discoloration.

In a season that has been anything but typical we all need to be vigilant in scouting our gardens for signs of disease or insect damage and work to minimize the damage.

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