

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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SUMMER GARDENING CAN BE A CHALLENGE

We certainly have had our share of heat lately, and this is evident throughout many gardens I have seen in our area. Sometimes I am amazed at how many problems can show up at the same time. If your garden hasn't turned out like you planned, don't get too frustrated and definitely don't give up. We all need second chances and fall gardening will soon be upon us with the opportunity to make up for any of summer's loss. In the meantime here are some vegetable problems you can look for now.

If you are growing tomatoes or squash you may be seeing a few problems. Leaf diseases like septoria leaf spot and early blight and blossom end rot on tomato fruit have been popping up lately and these are common issues on tomato plants.

Septoria leaf spot usually appears earlier in the season than early blight and produces small dark spots. Spots made by early blight are much larger and often have a distorted "target" pattern of concentric circles. Heavily infected leaves eventually turn yellow and drop and older leaves are more susceptible than younger ones.

Mulching and caging plants is recommended as this keeps plants off the ground and can decrease the chance of the disease spreading since it often comes from the soil. Rotation is another good idea when gardening tomatoes, but this isn't always practical for gardeners with small gardens.

Fungicides are the next best method of control and can be used to slow the spread of these diseases. Chlorothalonil is a good choice for fruiting plants because it has a 0-day waiting period, meaning that fruit can be harvested once the spray is dry. Chlorothalonil can be found in numerous products including Fertilome Broad-Spectrum Fungicide, Ortho Garden Disease Control, GardenTech Daconil and others. Be sure to start protecting plants when the disease is first seen since this will be the best chance to stop the damage.

Blossom end rot is another problem on tomato fruit. If you see large sunken dark spots on the bottom of the fruit this is probably the cause. This condition is caused by a lack of calcium in the developing fruit usually due to extreme temperatures or over-fertilization. Often the problem will correct itself with time but you can try adding 1 lb gypsum per 100 square feet to the soil if the problem is persistent.

Squash borers are a problem

I've received several calls about squash borers. These critters are the ugly little worms that burrow into the stems of squash vines and can eventually cause the plant to die due to tunneling activity.

Often gardeners notice that their vegetable plants suddenly wilt for no apparent reason. If this is the case, look for a borer. Stalk borers can actually attack many vegetables in the garden but peppers, tomatoes, and squash are the most common.

The borer is the larva of a moth that tunnels inside the stems. Usually it has a single white line running down it's back as well as other distinct markings.

If you look at affected plants closely, a small hole will be present in the side of the stem and if you split the stem, the larva will be revealed. Some gardeners slit the stem, remove the larva, and wrap the stem back together. This can work if you bury the damaged stem with soil and keep it moist, but heat and wind often render this operation unsuccessful. Damage is often sporadic with this pest, and there is only one generation per year which means once the attack is over it won't reoccur. Prevention may be possible with insecticide application during moth activity, but once the plant is infected control is nearly impossible.