

TOMATO PROBLEMS

Tomatoes are affected by many pest problems. Cultural controls that will help minimize problems include rotating crops and planting disease resistant varieties. Even then, pests will probably appear, and quick recognition and control are key to avoid major damage to the crop.

The tomato hornworm is a common insect that attacks tomatoes. These two inch long green, horned caterpillar feeds upon the leaves, weakening the plant. Another caterpillar, the green fruit worm, feeds on the green tomatoes, tunneling into the fruit. Control these insects by aggressive handpicking or spraying with *Bacillus Thuriangienses* (also call BT). This non-chemical control consists of bacteria, which only affects the larvae of moths or butterflies. It will not kill any other insect or animal.

White flies, aphids and leafhoppers are sucking insects that attack tomatoes and their relatives. Trapping is a non-chemical way to control these pests. Paint wooden stakes a brilliant yellow and coat them with Tanglefoot or a similar sticky compound. Place several stakes in among the plants. The insects are attracted to yellow and will become stuck on the stakes.

Several fungus diseases attack tomatoes. Early blight causes brown spots and yellowing leaves. It affects lower leaves first, but eventually defoliates the entire plant. Anthracnose also spots leaves. More importantly, it infests the fruit as it forms, showing up as soft, rotten spots as the fruit matures. These diseases spread most quickly when foliage is wet for a long period. Prevent them by spraying at blossom time or as soon as symptoms appear on the leaves. Fungicides such as Chlorothalonil may be applied every seven days or as the label specifies. The effectiveness of Chlorothalonil may also be enhanced by mixing in Copper:

Verticillium, bacterial and fusarium wilt are non-curable tomato diseases. These diseases usually appear in hot, dry weather. Infected plants wilt in a short period, soon dying. If you slice a stem open, you will see a dark stain in the water conducting tissue or an oozing liquid. To avoid water spot, be sure to water the plant below the leaf line.

Ref: Michigan State Extension Website, Hornworms: Are They eating My Tomatoes?; MSU Extension Website, When bad things Happen to Good Tomatoes.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

https://www.canr.msu.edu/lawn_garden/

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/>