

# Common Problems of Vegetables

**Blossom end rot** causes flat, dry, black areas on the bottoms of the fruit. The disorder is definitely most severe after fluctuating soil moisture, especially extremes of either too dry or too wet. Tomatoes planted early in cold soil are likely to develop it on the first fruits. **Solution:** Do not plant too early in cold soil, and maintain consistent watering. In emergency situations, foliage can be sprayed with calcium chloride solutions, such as Bonide Rot-Stop. Foliar treatment is not a substitute for maintaining adequate supplies of water.



**Cracked Fruits:** You may be taking too much care of them! When tomatoes crack open, the problem is usually that the plants are getting too much moisture and nutrients. **Solution:** Cut back on the water and fertilizer and look for cracking-resistant varieties.



**Old Leaves Have Brown or Black Spots, Black Patches at Stem End of Tomatoes:** Early blight is a common disease that disfigures old leaves and tomatoes. **Solution:** Remove the leaves as soon as you see spots form; this may prevent it from spreading to the rest of the plant. Spreading mulch over the soil and keeping the leaves dry can also be effective preventive measures. Spraying with fungicide can help, too, but only if you spray before the disease takes hold.



**Old Leaves Have Pale Green Spots That Look Water-Soaked:** This is late blight. Prevent the common fungal disease by removing infected leaves as soon as you see spots form. Other prevention techniques are to spread mulch over the soil, keep the leaves dry, and spraying with fungicide before the disease gets too bad. Late blight cannot be cured.



**Leaves Turn Yellow Before Wilting and Turning Brown:** Two common diseases -- verticillium and fusarium -- cause this symptom. Both are preventable, and most hybrid tomatoes are bred to resist them. **Solution:** Remove infected leaves as soon as you see spots form to prevent it from spreading through the entire plant. Also try spreading mulch over the soil, keeping the foliage dry, or as a last result, spraying with fungicide before the disease takes hold.



**Large Green Caterpillars That Eat the Foliage:** Tomato hornworms can rapidly devour your prized tomato plants. **Solution:** Organic options are to squash or drop the caterpillars into a bucket of soapy water or to spray with *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a bacterium that attacks and kills caterpillars. Note: Several species of wasp will lay their eggs on the caterpillars. If you see a hornworm with the eggs, don't bother killing it. The wasps are already doing it for you.



**Cucumbers are off-shaped (crooked or nubbins).**

This often occurs because of low soil moisture or cool temperatures at the time of flowering. Another possibility is poor pollination\* because of a lack of bees or a low number of male flowers.



**Flower drop in beans, melons, squash, and eggplants, tomatoes.** Occasional flower drop early in the season is normal since plants tend to produce more flowers than they can support to develop into fruit. However, extended flower drop, which interferes with fruit development, may be attributed to other factors. Some of these factors are: strong winds, moisture stress, high nitrogen rates, high temperatures, too much watering, lack of pollination\*, and too cool weather for bees to come out to the plants. Treatment with a product such as Bonide Blossom Set can offset poor weather conditions. (A natural plant growth hormone.)

\*Pollination issues can often be simply addressed by shaking the plants to loosen and distribute pollen, or using a small, soft paintbrush to manually pollinate the blooms.



**Herbicide damage** is another leaf problem. This results from using 2,4-D (Lawn Weed Killer) or related weed killers too close to desirable plants. Leaves of affected plants often become narrow, twisted and distorted. Stems may split and fruits may develop a catface pattern on them. Plants exposed to small amounts of 2,4-D usually recover, particularly if growing conditions are good.

**Squash Vine Borer:** This pest attacks cucumber, gourd, melon, pumpkin and squash plants by entering the base of stems in early summer, causing the vines to wilt. Masses of yellow "dust" can be seen coming out of the holes in the stems. You can control the borer by making a slit in the infested stem and removing the borer. Heap soil over the damaged stalk to encourage rooting. A delayed planting of squash may miss the feeding larvae. Clean up and dispose of vines after harvest.



**Powdery mildew** is caused by a fungi that appears as a white powdery growth on the stems and leaves. It affects cucumbers, pumpkins, melons, ornamental gourds, squash, and other vegetables. Disease development is very fast in three days and nights that are hot and dry during the day and the nights are cool with a high relative humidity. It attacks the vines and lower surfaces of the leaves first. The affected leaves turn yellow and finally dark brown causing an early death of the leaves, which affects fruit development. The disease tends to be a problem from late July to early September. It is more easily prevented than cured: choose disease-resistant varieties, avoid over-crowding, over-shading, and poor air circulation. Follow a regular spraying schedule with Fungonil for prevention and/or treatment. Because it begins on the undersides first, checking often when weather conditions have been unfavorable



can allow you a chance to treat before it goes too far.

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