



Pest Corner

August, 2008

TOMATO GROWING NOTES

Leaf-roll on tomatoes: This is a fairly common occurrence as the leaflets of older leaves roll upward along the edges and curl around the mid vein. The leaves have a normal green color and are firm and leathery to the touch. Eventually most of the leaves will be affected. Leaf-roll may be caused by excessive soil moisture. It does not damage the fruit and is not a cause for concern. Planting tomatoes in well-drained soil will help prevention of this condition in future years.

Tomato Late-Blight fungus: A common sign is foliage that dries up and tomatoes that develop gray-green spots which turn brown.

It happens in August as warm summer days are combined with dew, fog, rain. The humid and warm conditions foster the fungal disease. Green tomatoes do not ripen well and instead rot. Prevention includes placing a temporary roof over the plants to keep moisture off the foliage. Avoid wetting the foliage, more so in late afternoon and the evening. Stake and prune the plants to provide good air circulation.

Fungicide sprays, before disease begins, may prevent complete crop destruction. Fungicides registered for use include Bravo Weather Stik and Kop-R-Spray. Fungicides applied now, according to labeled directions will protect plants from infection.

This is the same fungus that was responsible for the great Irish potato famines from 1845 to 1847. Eggplant, pepper, potato, and tomatoes are in the same Solanaceae family. The fungicides Bravo, Maneb and Mancozeb are all registered for use on potatoes and provide an effective protectant against the disease when used according to labeled directions.

Blossom-end Rot: In spite of nice foliage and fruit set, blossom-end rot can occur. The blossom-end of the tomatoes turn brown/black appearing sunken. Often affects the fruit in the first cluster and usually fruit that sets later is not affected. This is a physiological problem and common in home gardens. It is not caused by a disease organism, but by the plant's inability to absorb calcium from the soil. This problem is often compounded when soils become too dry. Ensure consistent and uniform soil moisture to wet the soil through the entire root zone. Apply mulch around the plants as

needed to maintain even moisture. Adding lime to the planting area (soil) will help prevent blossom-end rot next season.

Foliage and Fruit Growth: Plants need enough foliage for photosynthesis to occur and ensure enough plant food (energy) is manufactured by the plant structures. Removal and trimming of a large number of leaves, while the plant is growing fruit - for the purpose of exposing the fruit to more sunlight - may be counterproductive. Removing a few leaves is all right, but too may defeat the purpose.

Toxic Plant Parts: Remind others that tomato leaves and several other plant parts (as in rhubarb, potato, etc.) may be poisonous to human consumption. This is the case with the fruit of the potato plant (small tomato-like fruit) that forms on the branches above the soil. These can be used as potato seed for next season (slower growth), but are poisonous because these contain toxic Solanine.

Adapted by Cecilia from articles written by Don Tapio, GH Extension Agent.