

URBAN FARMER

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Disease Control: Blossom end rot

Blossom end rot may be one of the most common problems a gardener can experience, but it's actually not a disease. The problem actually stems from a disorder caused by a calcium imbalance within the plant. It occurs in tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, squash, cucumbers and melons.

What is it?

Blossom end rot is characterized by a water-soaked spot at the blossom end of the fruit or vegetable. It is mostly experienced in the beginning of the growing season – when the weather and ground are usually wet. Damage will first begin to appear on the fruit when it is roughly half sized. The water-soaked area is the first symptom, but this area will enlarge and darken, donning a leathery feel. This will eventually cause the fruit or vegetable to rot. The stems and leaves of the plant will not show any symptoms, even if the fruit is affected by the disorder.

Blossom end rot is most commonly caused by a calcium deficiency set on by moisture inconsistency. Moisture fluctuations reduces the movement of calcium through the plant, and when the plant demands calcium it is unable to receive, the plant's tissues then begin to break down, therefore causing blossom end rot.

How to cure it:

Unfortunately, once blossom end rot is set in motion, the damage cannot be reversed. However, the process can be slowed by applying calcium supplements to the affected plant immediately. Pick and



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discard the affected fruit. Fruits affected by blossom end rot are still edible if the affected portion of the fruit is cut off and discarded. Only discard the entire fruit if mold or fungi are present.

How to prevent it:

The easiest way to prevent blossom end rot is to maintain a consistent level of moisture by watering when the soil is dry. Another way to prevent the disorder is by applying a calcium supplement, such as Tomato Rot Stop.

In colder areas, allow the soil to fully warm before planting, as cold soils have less nutrients, which will then possibly lead to not providing enough calcium for the plants. A way to plant earlier in the season in cold climates is by utilizing raised beds, which will warm the soil sooner than at ground level. Other preventative measures include using fertilizers low in nitrogen and high in phosphorous, as well as using watering



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cones which will help direct the water down further to the root of the plant. Apply mulch to help maintain the consistent moisture, and if your plants allow it, maintain the soil's pH at 6.5.

Ensuring your planting area has adequate drainage is another preventative measure, and, if transplanting, be sure to harden off any delicate young seedlings so they are not as susceptible to outdoor conditions.

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