

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

Disease Control: Early Blight

Early Blight is a fungal disease affecting tomatoes. The main difference between Early Blight and Late Blight is Late Blight is a much more serious disease. Early Blight is caused by the *Alternaria solani* fungus. This disease also can affect potatoes.

What is it?

Early Blight affects all parts of the tomato plant – the leaves, stems and fruits. Although this disease doesn't necessarily kill the tomato plants, it will stunt the plant's growth which will lead to less tomatoes on the plant. Usually, Early Blight will attack older plants but seedlings also are susceptible to the disease. In addition to older age, Early Blight is more common in plants that are stressed or already in poor health.

Early Blight can occur because of its presence in the soil, seeds or it can even last throughout the winter in tomato plant debris in the garden. The fungus prefers damp conditions such as rain or dew.

This fungus can be confused with Septoria leaf spot because the symptoms of spotting on the leaves are the same. The spots will first form on the leaves, and then the leaves turn yellow and fall off the plant. The leaves that die and fall off may expose the tomatoes to the sun in a negative way. Sometimes, the spots will form closer to ground level which can lead to stem girdling or collar rot. Although the plants may survive past those ailments, the tomatoes' growth will be stunted.



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Early Blight spots can also form on the tomatoes themselves. First, the spots will form on the stem end of the plant and create a dark, sunken area. Early Blight can affect both green and ripe tomatoes.

No species of tomato is completely resistant to Early Blight, but some have a higher resistance than others. Some of the tomato species with a higher resistance to Early Blight include Juliet, Pink Brandywine, Indigo Rose and others.

How to cure it:

The best way to make sure Early Blight doesn't spread throughout your entire garden is to keep a close eye on your plants and immediately remove any plant that is affected. By spraying a sulfur or copper spray on the affected areas, this may slow or stop the Early Blight's progress.



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How to prevent it:

The easiest ways to prevent Early Blight is by purchasing certified, disease-free seeds. Other preventative measures include providing plenty of space between your plants to increase circulation. Be sure to rid of all tomato plant debris in the garden once the harvest season is over, since Early Blight can overwinter in the plant debris. Another preventative measure is, if Early Blight attacks your tomatoes, try planting them elsewhere the next year, or plant them in pots instead.



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