

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

Common pests and diseases: Sweet potatoes

When growing vegetables, it is always exciting to care for the plant throughout its growing phase and then harvest it for delicious recipes later on, but one thing to watch out for is pests and diseases. Different plants are susceptible to different types of pests and diseases, and it is important to make yourself aware so you can keep a watchful eye and also take any preventative methods to keep your plants safe throughout their lifespan.

Sweet potatoes can fall victim to several different pests and diseases.

Pests:

Some of the common pests affecting sweet potatoes include the sweet potato stem borer and the white grub.

The sweet potato stem borer larvae will bore into the stem of the sweet potato and feed in the crown area. This causes wilting, yellowing and the plant will die. To identify the borers, locate fecal matter on the surface of the soil and holes in the stem of the plant. To manage this problem, keep the garden weed free and use pheromone traps.

The white grub feeds underground on parts of the stem or the roots. The infected plant will wilt and die. To manage this problem, plough deeply in the summer to expose the grub and provide proper drainage.

Diseases:

Common diseases affecting the sweet potato include Alternaria leaf spot, black rot, scab, pox and others.



[Sweet potato slips available at ufseeds.com](http://ufseeds.com)

Alternaria leaf spot causes brown lesions on the leaves with rings. Lesions usually occur on the older leaves. Stems may be affected, too. If the problem is bad enough, defoliation may occur. To prevent this disease, destroy all of the sweet potato residue immediately following harvest and plant resistant sweet potato varieties. Be sure to plant only disease-free seed.

Black rot causes stunted plants, wilting plants, plants that will become yellow and other symptoms. Plants may drop leaves and they may die. There will be circular brown-black spots on the tubers. To prevent this disease, only use disease-free seed. Practice good crop rotation and treat the seeds with appropriate fungicides prior to planting.

Scab causes small brown lesions on the leaf and stem veins which will then become corky in texture. Veins will shrink and the leaves will curl. Lesions on the stems will be slightly



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raised. To prevent this disease, avoid using overhead irrigation, destroy all crop residue immediately after harvest, and apply appropriate fungicides.

Pox will cause poor plant growth and a reduced yield. Corky lesions will be in a V shape on the tubers. To prevent this, use resistant varieties of sweet potatoes. Maintain a low pH in the soil and practice good crop rotation. You can also utilize fumigation of the soil prior to planting.

You can find sweet potato slips on our website at ufseeds.com!



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