

Other Tomato Oddities and Tips

In the previous two columns, I described some of our most common tomato diseases. That's right, I said some problems. There are many others, but those were the ones we see most often. Of course, I get many questions about tomatoes that turn out to be other conditions.

One of the questions is about plants that bloom but don't fruit. Almost always this will coincide with extremely hot weather. Yes, it can be too hot and plants will abort blooms. Mulch and moisture management usually helps and when temperatures moderate, the plants continue to produce normally.

What's causing my tomatoes to be so strangely shaped? The condition is called catfacing and we've all seen this in our garden. It is a condition caused by factors that disturb initial fruit development during blossoming. Symptoms are extreme malformation and scarring and it is often associated with blossom end rot. Two factors that may cause catfacing are cool weather during fruit set and herbicide injury.

The fruit, often green, sometimes will get a whitish or yellowish patch on the side facing the sun. In severe cases, the patches can shrink and form a flat grayish spot with a paper-like surface. This condition is sunscald and can be due to leaf blights or simply movement of leaves that expose the fruit to direct sun during extremely hot days.

Gardeners also will bring me tomatoes that have grayish brown blotches on the shoulder or internal wall tissue that is brown. Fruit on some clusters may be affected while others have no symptoms. These fruits are said to have a condition known as internal browning or graywall. The cause is not clear but the condition seems to be associated with low light intensity, low temperatures, excessive soil moisture, high nitrogen levels and low potassium levels.

Good cultural practices can go a long way to helping us deal with the many problems that can plague tomatoes. I've mentioned these in years past but here they are again.

Soil test and follow recommendations. Lime to a pH of 6.0 to 6.5.

Use mulch. Mulch conserves moisture, moderates soil temperatures, and prevents disease containing soil from splashing onto plants.

Water deeply when needed and avoid overhead watering to keep leaves as dry as possible.

Buy disease resistant varieties.

If you use tobacco, wash your hands before handling plants or picking. Tobacco mosaic virus is introduced this way.

If you do think you have a disease issue, give me a call. There are some fungicides that can prevent or slow down some tomato diseases.