

Tomato Wilt Diseases

The tomato wilt diseases are serious and can leave gardeners feeling totally helpless and frustrated.

Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV) is a common disease that is spread by thrips. I used to see TSWV as a disease of commercial growers primarily, but it has become the number one disease problem. The top of the plant will look stunted or wilted, and the young leaves may yellow and have brown or black discoloration. The veins on the underside of leaves may thicken and turn purple. Fruit can have raised or flat rings or circles on them. Ripe fruit will have yellow circles or semi-circles.

Once tomatoes get TSWV, there is no control. Infected plants, early in the season, should be pulled up discarded or destroyed as quickly as possible. Late in the season, let the infected plants finish ripening the fruit they have. When you purchase transplants, choose varieties that are resistant. The tag should specifically say it is resistant to TSWV.

Fusarium Wilt is caused by a fungus that blocks the water conducting tissues in the plant. Leaves yellow and wilt, after starting at the bottom of the plant. Fusarium wilt can affect just one side or one to several branches. The plant can die early producing no fruit. If you cut into the plant, the vascular tissue just under the surface will be brown. Look for resistant varieties.

Bacterial Wilt is really a bad guy among tomato diseases. This disease causes rapid wilting and death. The plant dies so quickly it does not have time to yellow. Bacterial wilt browns the pith or middle of the stem. The pith can even become hollow. One of the distinct diagnostic tips for this disease is to cut a short sector of the stem and suspend it in a clear glass of water. You should see a milky ooze streaming out of the bottom of the cut. There are no control measures or resistant varieties. It also attacks peppers, potatoes and eggplant. Carefully dig out infected plants and soil and discard. Clean your shovel with a bleach solution after digging out infected plants.