

What's going on with my tomatoes!?!?!?

Here in the South, growing, sharing and eating a garden-fresh tomato is a favorite pastime for many people. The most challenging part of the process is the growing because everybody has their own special way of growing the best and juiciest tomatoes; but equally important is dealing with challenges we face in the process. Over the past couple of weeks, I have received a quite a few calls on problems or challenges with tomato plants. Frustrated gardeners here in the county have spent many hours nurturing their favorite summer vegetable plant. However, to their surprise, the nurturing and constant attention did not pass to make way for a good crop. So what's the problem!?!?!? Well, in this week's article I will give you some best management practices and answers to some common tomato problems that have been affecting tomato growers here in the county.

Best management practices will help the novice and the most experienced gardener when it comes to growing tomato plants in the home garden. It is very important that you purchase quality transplants or seeds that are healthy, strong, and free of disease. Soil fertility is key to producing quality fruit. Furthermore, your tomato plants will be very healthy and strong as a result. This will significantly reduce the chances of fungus and diseases that affect tomato plants. When growing tomatoes, it is a good practice to rotate your plants from the original area from the previous year. Fungus can harbor in the soil from that previous growing season and will rear its ugly head if you plant tomato plants in the same space from last year. In addition, watering your tomatoes down by roots accompanied with some mulch will greatly reduce spreading of disease or fungus to your plants. Please don't spray the tomato plants with water, as this will also greatly increase fungus and disease to your tomato plants.

Some common problems and answers with tomato plants this year are blossom drop, early blight, and aphids. Listed below are a few answers to common tomato problems. Blossom drop occurs when you have a healthy plant and blossoms, and then all of the sudden they begin to curl over and turn brown. Well, the answer is that pollination did not take place because of high temperatures, lack of bees, and/or low nitrogen levels. This is a frustrating problem that can be corrected by increasing soil fertility and planting flowers in or near your garden. As for early blight, this is very prevalent during the hotter months of the year. This disease produces brown to black, target-like spots on older leaves. Affected leaves may turn yellow and then drop, leaving the fruit exposed to sunburn. Sanitation is the best control. Remove all diseased plant tissue on the ground, as the fungus overwinters on leaf debris. A best management practice is not to plant tomatoes in the same place next year. Space plants further apart to improve air circulation and avoid watering with overhead irrigation.

The insect that can be hard to see is an aphid. Aphids are soft-bodied insects that can be brown, reddish or green in color. This insect causes a significant problem with young plants because they like feeding on newly formed leaves, which will cause them to be crinkled and malformed. Aphid populations can be assessed by examining terminals and the undersides of leaves. Treatment for aphids includes bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, malathion or an insecticidal soap. Please follow recommendations on the label for these ready to use products. If you have had these problems, a combination of problems or some I did not mention, don't let it discourage you because this is just a challenge and I we know we can overcome these challenges. Have a great Fourth of July. If you would like more information on common problems that affect tomato plants, please don't hesitate to call the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by at 23 Water Street, Watkinsville, GA.

