

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

Common pests and diseases: Corn

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.

Corn can fall victim to several different pests and diseases.

Pests:

There are several pests which affect corn, such as corn earworm, European corn borer, corn sap beetles, corn root aphids, wireworms, seed corn maggots and raccoons.

Corn earworms also are known as the tomato fruitworm or cotton bollworm. It is a caterpillar that can reach up to 2 inches long, and it can be green or purple-brown in color. These worms prevent pollination, and the larvae of the worms feed on the silks and kernels. To prevent these worms, squirt mineral oil into each ear of corn after the silks have begun to dry, and you can also spray the silk and the entire plant with Bt. Cut off the tip of the corn's ear or any affected kernels if there is earworm damage, but you can eat the rest of the ear.

The European corn borer is a 1-inch long caterpillar that's brown with rows of brown spots. Larvae will bore into the stalks and ears. Signs of corn borer damage include



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bent stalks and broken tassels. Treat ears and leaves with Bt as soon as the silks partially emerge to prevent this from happening and spray with a pesticide every five days if you spot borer activity.

Corn sap beetles are black beetles that create larvae similar to maggots, which eat the kernels of roasting corn. Plant resistant varieties and be sure to clean up all the crop residue to prevent this from happening.

Corn root aphids are light green bugs that feed on the corn's roots and this makes the plant become stunted and yellowed. Sprinkle wood ash over the plants and soil to keep these bugs away.

Seed corn maggots bore into the corn's sprouting seeds and keep them from growing further. Seeds are more susceptible if planted in cool, wet soil early in the season.



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Raccoons target ripening sweet corn, so to keep them out of the garden, add a 3-foot chicken wire fence topped with electrical wire or play a portable radio in the cornfield all night.

Diseases:

Corn plants also can fall victim to diseases such as Stewart's bacterial wilt and corn smut.

Stewart's bacterial wilt can affect sweet corn at any stage of its growth, but it is the most harmful to young plants. It can cause dwarfing and wilting. Leaves will have wavy edges and develop yellow-brown streaks. To prevent this, clean all your crop residue, utilize crop rotation and control corn flea beetles.

Corn smut is caused by a soil fungus, but if it affects your plants, they are still edible. Grayish white galls will appear on the ear or tassel and as they ripen, they become black and burst open, which spreads the smut. This fungus does best in hot and dry weather and will usually target weak plants first. Rotate crops and pick the galls off if you notice them and then burn them before they blacken.

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