

URBAN FARMER

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Common pests and diseases: Watermelons

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.

Watermelons can fall victim to several different pests and diseases.

Pests:

Some of the common pests affecting watermelons include aphids, cabbage loopers, cutworms and thrips.

Aphids are soft-bodied insects that bring problems to lots of plants. They create discoloration of the leaves, necrotic spots and stunted growth. Use tolerant varieties and only apply insecticides if there's a high infestation.

Cabbage loopers will eat small and large holes in the leaves, and they oftentimes cause extensive damage. The caterpillars are pale green in color and have white lines down the sides. To manage this pest, encourage natural enemies or apply *Bacillus thuringiensis*.

Cutworms will cause the stems of the seedlings or even young transplants to be severed at the soil line. If the plant is older, irregular holes will be eaten in the surface of the fruit. To prevent this from happening,



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remove all crop residue from the soil, spread diatomaceous earth around the base of the plants and only use insecticides if absolutely necessary.

Thrips may cause distortion if there is a high population, or the leaves may appear silvery. Avoid planting watermelon near onions, garlic or celeriac because thrips can build up there. Another preventative measure is to use reflective mulch and apply insecticides if absolutely necessary.

Diseases:

Some of the most common diseases affecting melons, specifically watermelons, include anthracnose, *Alternaria* leaf spot, gummy stem blight and more.

Anthracnose will cause small, dark spots on crown leaves after the vines begin to run. This disease can be seedborne and it can affect all but the youngest leaves. Treat seeds, practice crop rotation and utilize



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the appropriate fungicides to prevent this disease.

Alternaria leaf spot causes round or irregular lesions on older leaves. This disease prefers wet conditions, and it is a fungus. It can be controlled by practicing crop rotation, destroying all crop debris after harvest and applying the appropriate fungicides.

Gummy stem blight will cause irregular or round brown lesions on cotyledons or brown or white lesions on the crown of the fruit and on the stems. The fruit may even ooze a sticky amber substance. This disease favors warm, wet conditions. To manage this problem, be sure to use disease-free seed, treat seed before planting them, rotate crops with other non-cucurbits to reduce the possibility of disease, reduce the crop residue and apply the appropriate fungicides when necessary.

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