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Common pests and diseases: Tomatillos

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.

Tomatillos can fall victim to several different pests and diseases.

Pests:

The most common pests affecting tomatillos include aphids, cutworms and slugs.

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.

Cutworms will cause the stems of young plants to be severed at the soil line, and irregular-shaped holes may be eaten into the surface of the tomatillos. To prevent cutworms from infesting your plants, remove all crop debris from the soil after harvest, apply stem collars covering the stems for at least 3 inches above the soil line and apply pesticides when needed.

Slugs will leave large holes in foliage or even consume the leaves in their entirety. They will leave a slime trail and typically will feed at night. Slugs are usually more of



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a problem in damp weather. Handpick the slugs from the tomatillos, or use a trap of cornmeal or beer.

Diseases:

Tomatillos can fall victim to several different diseases, including anthracnose, bacterial leaf spot, root knot nematodes and more.

Anthracnose causes circular lesions on the fruit, and sometimes these lesions can expand to cover the entire fruit's surface. Plant disease-free seed and treat seeds with hot water prior to planting. Practice crop rotation and make sure you plow all crop debris into the soil after harvest to help prevent inoculum in the soil. Anthracnose is found in most vegetable-growing areas and can cause large losses to crops if untreated.

Bacterial leaf spot will cause translucent spots with yellow edges that will slowly become larger. This disease does better in cooler temperatures, and it can disfigure



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the flower heads. When the spots enlarge, they may become irregularly circular with a red-like center. Remove the infected plants and practice good crop rotation. Also, try to avoid overhead watering.

Root knot nematodes are microscopic pests that cause galls, or swelling, to form on the roots. Plants will wilt, or they may appear stunted. Typically, this problem is more frequently-occurring in southern states. To manage this disease, don't plant the tomatillos into infected soil. You can also try planting varieties of Nema-Gone marigolds around your tomatillo plants to prevent this.

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