

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

Common pests and diseases: Pumpkins

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.

Pumpkins can fall victim to several different pests and diseases.

Pests:

The most common pests affecting pumpkins include aphids, armyworms and the cabbage looper, as well as others.

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.

Armyworms will cause closely grouped holes in the foliage, and heavy feeding can cause leaves to become skeletonized. Pumpkin fruit will show shallow and dry wounds. You may see egg clusters on the leaves. To organically control armyworms, encourage natural enemies or apply *Bacillus thuringiensis*.

Cabbage loopers will leave large holes in the leaves and can cause lots of damage. Eggs are typically laid in singularly. To control cabbage loopers, encourage natural enemies. You can handpick them from the



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plants, or apply *Bacillus thuringiensis* to kill the larvae. Stay away from chemical sprays which might harm natural predators.

Diseases:

Some of the common diseases affecting pumpkins include *Alternaria* leaf blight, *Alternaria* leaf spot and powdery mildew.

Alternaria leaf blight will cause small yellowish-brown spots with a green or yellow halo to appear on the older leaves first. Eventually the lesions expand and the leaves will curl and die. To prevent this disease, practice crop rotation to reduce levels of inoculum, remove crop debris from the field as quickly as possible or plow it deep into the soil and be sure to apply the appropriate fungicides when applicable. Another method of prevention is to water plants at the base rather than overhead.

Alternaria leaf spot causes round or irregular lesions on older leaves. This



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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.

Powdery mildew is also a fungus affecting pumpkins, and it causes a white or gray dusty material on the upper surface of the leaves. It spreads to cover the entire leaf, which then kills the leaf. This disease prefers high humidity, and it is best treated by applying the appropriate fungicides as soon as you notice a problem. This disease usually occurs on older leaves first, and it typically appears later in the growing season.

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