

URBAN FARMER

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Common pests and diseases: Tomatoes

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.

Tomatoes can fall victim to several different pests and diseases.

Pests:

Some of the common pests affecting tomato plants include aphids, the beet armyworm, the Colorado potato beetle and the tomato hornworm.

Aphids will be soft-bodied insects usually showing up on the undersides of the leaves. They will be green or yellow in color. The aphids secrete a sticky substance which can cause mold. Knock the aphids off the leaves with a jet of water. Only use insecticides if the infestation is out of control.

The beet armyworm will cause singular or multiple closely group holes in the foliage of the plant. Apply *Bacillus thuringiensis* and encourage natural enemies.

The Colorado potato beetle can cause complete defoliation if the infestation is bad enough. The adult beetles will emerge in the spring, and they can lay eggs in up to two dozen at a time. The eggs are laid on the undersides of the leaves. Most of these



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beetles have insecticide resistance, but if you plant early-maturing tomatoes, they may escape damage. Spinosad is effective against the adult beetles.

The tomato hornworm is a big green worm that can cause heavy feeding damage on the leaves or completely strip the leaves from the plant. To treat, handpick the larvae from the plant and promote the population of natural enemies. Use *bacillus thuringiensis* only when an infestation is out of control.

Diseases:

Some of the common diseases affecting tomatoes include anthracnose, zippering and sun scald.

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



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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.

Zippering causes brown scars from the petiole to the blossom end of the fruit and holes may appear. Grow tolerant varieties to prevent this from happening.

Sun scald causes white or yellow necrotic patches more commonly on the red fruit on the side that faces the sun. To prevent this, promote healthy plants with full foliage which makes tomatoes less likely to be victims of sun scald.

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