

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

Common pests and diseases: Okra

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.

Okra can fall victim to several pests and diseases.

Pests:

Insects affecting okra plants include armyworms, corn earworms, cucumber beetles, cabbage loopers and more.

Armyworms will cause closely grouped and irregular holes in the leaves of the okra plant. They feed heavily as larvae and cause skeletonized leaves. Shallow wounds also can appear on the fruit. To organically control this issue, apply *Bacillus thuringiensis*.

Corn earworms will cause damage to the leaves, buds, flowers and pods of the okra plant. This insect can overwinter in the soil. Monitor the plants for signs of larvae or eggs, and apply *Bacillus thuringiensis* if you notice an infestation. You also can apply Entrust SC.

Cucumber beetles are spotted yellow beetles that cause stunted seedlings and damaged leaves, as well as plants exhibiting signs of bacterial wilt and will scar the okra. These beetles will overwinter in the soil. To prevent them, use floating row covers, apply kaolin



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clay and if necessary, use an insecticide.

Cabbage loopers will cause holes in the leaves that can vary in size, and the caterpillars are pale green with white lines. Hand pick the loopers from the plants or apply *Bacillus thuringiensis* to kill the younger larvae.

Diseases:

Some of the common diseases affecting okra plants include charcoal rot, fusarium wilt, powdery mildew, southern blight and more.

Charcoal rot will cause discoloration in the stem at the soil line, and it also can create cankers on the stem. Leaves can wilt or fall from the plant. To prevent this disease, practice crop rotation and avoid water stress by utilizing proper irrigation.

Fusarium wilt will cause seedling leaves to wilt and older plants can also show wilting or leaf chlorosis. Wilting will be gradual.



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The disease prefers warm temperatures. To prevent this, use disease-free seed, plant resistant varieties and fumigate the soil.

Powdery mildew will appear as a powdery white covering on the leaves, and the patches may then cover the entire plant. Leaves may roll upward. Use overhead irrigation to wash the fungus off the plant, and plant the okra as early in the season as possible.

Southern blight will cause leaves to suddenly wilt, foliage will yellow and the stem will turn brown. This fungus prefers high temperatures and high humidity, making it more common in subtropical regions. If this disease occurs, remove all infected plants. To prevent the disease, don't overcrowd plants, rotate crops and wrap the lower part of the stems with aluminum foil.

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