

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).

Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mg helpline@masshort.org.

Fighting Tomato Blight

It is important to catch Tomato Blight early, before it spreads to all of your tomato plants and possibly other plants in the same family, such as potatoes, eggplants and peppers. Here are their symptoms and what to do if tomato blight threatens your vegetable garden.

Early Blight

What is Early Blight? It is a common disease of tomatoes and potatoes caused by the fungus *Alternaria solani*.

What are the symptoms? Early Blight produces a wide range of symptoms at all stages of plant growth. It can affect the foliage, stems and fruit of tomatoes. The classic symptom is dark spots with concentric rings on older leaves. The surrounding leaf area may turn yellow. The affected leaves may die prematurely exposing the tomatoes to sunburn.

How does it survive? The fungus overwinters in infected plant residue in or on the soil where it can survive for a year or more. It can also be seed-borne. New spores are produced the following season.

How is it dispersed? Water, wind, insects, and other animals including man transport the spores.

Late Blight

What is Late Blight? Is highly contagious and very destructive disease of tomatoes and potatoes caused by the fungus *Phytophthora infestans*. It is the disease responsible for the Irish Potato Famine.

What are the symptoms? Late Blight affects both the

leaves and fruit of tomatoes. Greasy looking irregularly shaped gray spots appear on leaves. A ring of white mold can develop around the spots especially in wet weather. The spots eventually turn dry and papery. Blackened areas may appear on the stems. The tomatoes also develop large irregularly shaped greasy gray spots.

How does it survive? The fungus *Phytophthora infestans* needs live tissue to survive. Tomatoes will not carry Late Blight over the winter because freezing kills the whole plant. Potato tubers that are infected with Late Blight and don't freeze or decay during the winter can survive.

How is it dispersed? It produces spores very rapidly and the wind carries them to other plants in the field, adjoining fields and gardens and beyond.

How can you manage Tomato Blight?

1. Remove affected plants and thoroughly cleanup fall garden debris. Do not compost it, bag it and dispose.
2. Buy healthy resistant or tolerant varieties of tomatoes and potatoes.
3. Rotate crops; don't plant tomatoes where tomatoes, potatoes, peppers or eggplant were planted in the last three years.
4. Give your plants plenty of space.
5. Mulch to prevent splash up from rain and minimize weeds.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>