

Leaf Spot Diseases Attack Tomatoes

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July has arrived and maybe you are one of the lucky gardeners who has harvested your first tomatoes of the season. Whether you are harvesting tomatoes or not, I'd be willing to bet that your tomato plants have early blight or one of the other tomato leaf spot diseases.

Early blight is caused by a fungus and is probably the most common disease of tomatoes in our region. The pathogen is in the soil and comes in contact with the plant primarily through rainwater splashing soil onto the plant. Once the plant is infected, the disease moves from the lower part of the plant upward and destroying the leaves that feed the tomato and shade the fruit.

It's frustrating to deal with early blight and other tomato leaf spot diseases. However, there are some things that we can do to limit the effects of the diseases on the plants and our harvest. Begin by purchasing healthy transplants. Rotate where you plant your tomatoes in the garden. This may be a challenge for gardeners with small areas. Space plants far enough apart to allow air circulation through the area. This helps the plants to dry off quicker from overnight dews or rainfall.

What do you do when early blight or other leaf spot diseases attack your tomatoes? Remove affected leaflets that have died from the plant and from the garden. This will prevent further spread of the diseases through spores on the dead tissue. Protect the healthy tissue with timely fungicide sprays. Leaf spot fungicides containing chlorothalonil or mancozeb are effective. Fungicide sprays should be applied to leaves, stems and fruit of the plants to slow the spread of the diseases. Controlling early blight and other leaf spot diseases on tomato may extend the tomato harvest until the first killing frost in the fall.