

## Tomato fruit troubles

Many problems that occur with tomato fruit are not caused by disease or insects. These problems are usually easier to prevent than to cure.

Willie Chance, Extension Agent with the University of Georgia, provided this list and description of common tomato fruit problems.

Blossom-end rot is a serious problem of ripening tomatoes. As the fruit ripens, the blossom-end turns dry, brown and leathery. The spot is sunken and these tomatoes can ripen before others. It is caused by a calcium deficiency in the fruit and can be prevented by the control of nutrition and watering.

Fruit cracking can be caused by periods of very fast growth during times of high temperature and moisture supply or by rains after a dry period. Not all cracking can be avoided but you can lessen its severity by mulching and maintaining an even water supply.

Catfacing is a condition in which the fruit is malformed or irregularly shaped, often with brown scars at the blossom end and sometimes running up the side of the fruit. The blossom-end of the fruit will often be puckered with deep crevices. Cool temperatures cause this at time of pollination and early growth. The only control is to plant later or to use row covers to increase temperature on cool days and nights. It usually only affects the earliest fruit set.

Leaf rolling often occurs when the plant has set a heavy load of fruit. Wet soils can also cause leaf roll. Leaf rolling usually begins on the older leaves and moves up the plant. The condition is harmless and should not hurt final production. Since heavy pruning can cause leaf roll, one control is to prune less heavily.

Uneven ripening can be caused by several factors including nutrition, high temperature and disease. The most common cause in the home garden is probably too high nitrogen rates and low potassium rates. One wall or one portion of the tomato will remain gray or white after the rest of the tomato turns red. The best control is to take a soil sample and fertilize accordingly.

Sunscald appears as a white-blistered area on the top of the tomato. The area can turn leathery and be invaded by rots. To control, do not prune heavily and maintain nutrition and pest control so as to provide a good leafy cover for the fruits.

Blossom drop occurs wherever temperatures exceed or are less than a certain optimum range. Although this range varies with tomato variety, the night temperature should be between 55 and 75°F for best blossom set. Certain varieties are sold as 'cold set' or 'heat set' varieties and will set fruit more consistently at the extremes of this range.

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