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Leaf-Spot Diseases of Tomato

If you haven't started already, now is the time to scout for tomato leaf spot diseases. We typically see a couple of diseases this time of year just as fruit get to about the size of a walnut: Septoria leaf spot and early blight.

While both will have similar brown spots on the leaves, there are minor disease differences. The spots of Septoria are smaller and typically occur before early blight, while early blight lesions are larger, often with a distorted "target" pattern of concentric circles. With both diseases, heavily infected leaves eventually turn yellow and drop. This will tend to occur from the bottom of the plant and work its way up (older leaves are more susceptible to infections than younger ones). Fortunately, there are multiple options to fight against these diseases.

You can do a lot to prevent diseases by using physical control practices like mulching, caging, or staking. All three help keep plants off the ground, making them less apt to get infected as they provide enhanced circulation and faster drying of foliage. Mulching can also help prevent splashing water from transferring disease spores to the plant.

Fungicides might be an option, especially if disease pressure is still light (it's next to impossible to control heavy infestations of these diseases). Coverage of both the upper and lower leaf surfaces is essential for control. Be ready to reapply a fungicide after rainfall.

While there are many products available, be sure you read and follow label instructions. For example, products labeled for tomato that contain the active ingredient chlorothalonil (there are many...) have a zero-day waiting period prior to harvest. Once the spray is dry – fruit can be harvested. Products that contain the active ingredient mancozeb, on the other hand, have a five-day waiting period between application and harvest (you might want to do some pre-application picking before fruit are fully red for ripening).

Make a mental note now to implement rotation in to your disease control toolbox for next year as well. Rotation is a great strategy whether you have disease pressure or not, but can be especially helpful in situations where diseases have caused problems. Your garden space may be too small to make it work well, but try to rotate tomatoes to a location that hasn't had tomatoes or one of their relatives (pepper, potato, eggplant) for several years.

For more on these diseases, pick up a copy of *Tomato Leaf and Fruit Diseases and Disorders*, available online at <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/L721.pdf> or by request from your District Extension Office. It gives a great overview of the disease, including color pictures to aid in disease identification. It also has a chart of control products separated by active ingredient for your reference. Always be sure to read and follow label directions.