



Late Blight in Tomatoes and Potatoes – Still a Concern for Gardeners

Late blight is a very infectious and very destructive disease that is killing tomato and potato plants in gardens. It is the same disease that caused the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s. Late blight can quickly wipe out weeks of tender care in a home garden. This year's cool, wet weather created perfect conditions for the disease. Late blight has never occurred as early or been as widespread in the U.S.

► Classic symptoms:

- On potato plants:
 - Late blight lesions can occur on both leaves and stems. The first appearance of lesions commonly occurs after periods of wet weather.
 - Black lesions appear within 3-7 days of infection of leaves. Under humid conditions, delicate, whitish fungal spore producing structures are produced at the edge of the lesion, particularly on the underside of the leaf.
 - Lesions turn brown when they dry up, and are often surrounded by a halo of gray-green tissue. Once lesions dry up, the white spore masses will not be visible.
- On Potato Tubers:

Infected potatoes have shallow, brownish or purplish lesions on the surface of the tuber. If you cut across the surface of these infected areas, you'll see a reddish-brown, dry, granular rot that extends up to half an inch into the flesh. Don't allow any discarded tubers to sprout and possibly produce late blight spores.
- On tomatoes:

Symptoms on tomato leaves and stems are similar to those on potato.
- On tomato fruit:
 - Late blight causes a firm, dark, greasy looking lesion from which the fungal spore producing structures emerge under humid conditions.

You need to act quickly to protect your garden-grown tomato and potato plants and to make sure that your plants don't become a source of spores that could infect commercial farms, as late blight spores are easily dispersed by wind.

Cornell associate professor of plant pathology and plant-microbe biology, Meg McGrath, recommends that gardeners:

- Examine their tomato and potato plants thoroughly at least once a week for signs of late blight;
- Spray fungicides preventively and regularly, and/or
- Be prepared to destroy plants when late blight starts to become severe
- If you want to try to control late blight with fungicides, you need to begin spraying now -- even before you see symptoms -- and you need to continue spraying regularly,
- Use a product that contains chlorothalonil. Copper is not very effective on late blight.

Chlorothalonil (the active ingredient in Ortho Max Garden Disease Control) is being recommended for protection from late blight in garden tomatoes and potatoes. Chlorothalonil is only effective if used before the disease appears and should be reapplied every 5-7 days if wet weather persists. Chlorothalonil is a protectant fungicide, with no systemic movement in the plant, so thorough coverage is necessary. Other products containing chlorothalonil include Bonide Fung-onil, Fung-onil multipurpose, Ortho Daconil 2787 and Dragon Daconil 2787.

If you believe that you have plants that are showing signs of late blight, please contact your local Cornell Cooperative Extension office to get confirmation. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Franklin County will gladly inspect, at no charge, any samples brought into our office. Call 483-7403 and ask to speak with Richard.

Late blight infected plants should be bagged in plastic bags that are sealed up tightly and placed in the trash. Diseased plants should not be added to a compost pile or allowed to remain in the garden.

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