

## **Post Rock Answers**

**By Cassie Homan June 18, 2021**

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### **Tomato Troubles**

Tomatoes are one of the most popular vegetables in the garden. Everyone loves the taste of a fresh juicy, homegrown tomato. Sales of tomato transplants have skyrocketed in recent years with tomato plants being an important part of the spring bedding-plant industry. Tomatoes are relatively easy to grow, but we often run into a few troubles. Below are some common tomato problems and how to solve them.

Every year we have calls from gardeners who have tomato plants with leaves that curl up. When tomato plants grow vigorously in mild, spring weather the top growth often exceeds the root development. When the first few days of warm, dry summer weather hit, the plant 'realizes' that it has a problem and needs to increase its root development. The plant tries to reduce its leaf area by rolling leaves. The leaves curl along the length of the leaf (leaflet) in an upward fashion. It is often accompanied by a thickening of the leaf giving it a leathery texture. Though rolling usually occurs during the spring to summer shift period, it may also occur after a heavy cultivating or hoeing, a hard rain, waterlogged soil or any sudden change in weather. This leaf roll is a temporary condition that goes away after a week or so when the plant has a chance to acclimate, recover from injury, or the soil has a chance to dry out.

During the summer, two common leaf-spot diseases appear on tomato plants. Septoria leaf spot and early blight, both show up as brown spots on the leaves.

Septoria leaf spot usually appears earlier in the season than early blight and produces small dark spots. Spots made by early blight are much larger and often have a distorted "target" pattern of concentric circles. Heavily infected leaves eventually turn yellow and drop. Older leaves are more susceptible than younger ones, so these diseases often start at the bottom of the plant and work up.

Mulching, caging, or staking keeps plants off the ground, making them less vulnerable. Better air circulation allows foliage to dry quicker than in plants allowed to sprawl. Mulching also helps prevent water from splashing and carrying disease spores to the plant.

In situations where these diseases have been a problem in the past, rotation is a good strategy. If rotation is not feasible, fungicides are often helpful. Be sure to cover both upper and lower leaf surfaces, and reapply fungicide if rainfall removes it.

Plants usually become susceptible when the tomato fruit is about the size of a walnut. Chlorothalonil is a good choice for fruiting plants because it has a 0-day waiting period, meaning that fruit can be harvested once the spray is dry. Chlorothalonil can be found in numerous products including Fertilome Broad-Spectrum Landscape and Garden Fungicide, Ortho Garden Disease Control, GardenTech Daconil and others. Start protecting plants when the disease is first seen. It is virtually impossible to control this disease on heavily infected plants. If chlorothalonil doesn't seem to be effective, try mancozeb (Bonide Mancozeb Flowable). Mancozeb does have a five-day waiting period between application and when the fruit can be harvested.

Make sure to give your tomatoes extra care this summer. You just might find yourself with a large harvest! If you have troubles with your tomatoes this season call your local extension office for more resources.

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