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## What is Wrong with My Tomato Plant?

You can experience disappointing results growing tomatoes because the plants and fruit are vulnerable to several common disorders as well as attacks by various pests. If your plant is not producing 10-15 pounds of fruit there is a chance there may be a problem, such as:

### **Sunburn—**

Fruit turns light brown and leathery on side exposed to sun

**Probable Cause:** Overexposed to sunlight

**Solution:** Maintain plant vigor to produce adequate leaf cover, avoid over-pruning, provide partial shade during hours of intense sunlight

### **Leaf Roll—**

Older leaves roll upward and inward rather suddenly, become stiff to the touch, brittle, and leathery

**Probable Cause:** High soil moisture, high light intensity

**Solutions:** Maintain even soil moisture, provide partial shade during hours of intense sunlight

### **Blossom End Rot—**

Water-soaked spot on blossom end of fruit enlarges and darkens, becomes sunken and leathery. Affects both green and ripe fruit

**Probable Cause:** Calcium nutrition and water balance in the plant, aggravated by high soil salt content and fluctuating soil moisture

**Solutions:** Maintain even soil moisture, amend soil with gypsum if soil is deficient in calcium, amend planting area with compost to improve water retention, avoid heavy application of high-nitrogen fertilizers

### **Fruit Cracks and Catfacing—**

Circular concentric cracks around the stem end, cracks radiating outward from stem, malformation and cracking at the blossom end

**Probable Cause:** Periods of very fast growth with high temperatures & soil moisture levels, wide fluctuation in soil moisture

**Solutions:** Keep soil evenly moist, maintain good leaf cover or provide partial shade, mulch around the plant 3-7 inches deep to maintain soil moisture and temperature.

## Could it be a Pest at Work?

**Entire leaves and small stems may be consumed; large pieces from green fruit may be chewed—**

**Probable Cause:** **Hornworms** (*Manduca* spp.) of all sizes with distinctive horn at the rear end; mature caterpillars are very large, up to 4 inches

**Solutions:** Handpick or snip hornworms with shears, natural enemies normally keep populations under control, *Bacillus thuringiensis* or spinosad are effective against smaller larvae

**Yellowing, silvering, or drying leaves that have tiny nymphs on the undersides of leaves, sticky honeydew on leaves, fruit, or beneath plants or a covering of black, sooty mold—**

**Probable Cause:** Whiteflies ( numerous species)

**Solutions:** Prune off infested leaves when you first detect them; hose off adults or use hand-held vacuum; install ready-to-use, sticky coated yellow traps, or make your own— Use one trap for every medium-size plant; encourage beneficial insects such as lady beetles and lacewings; protect good bugs by avoiding the use of insecticides that can be toxic to a broad range of insects; apply insecticidal soaps, soap-pyrethrum mixtures, or neem oil; remove infested plants

**Curling, yellowing, and distortion of leaves and stunting of shoots; presence of sticky honeydew that often turns black with the growth of sooty mold—**

**Probable Cause:** **Aphids** (numerous species)

**Solutions:** Prune out infested leaves and stems, knock off plants by shaking the plant or spraying with a stream of water; wait for hot weather—most aphids are heat intolerant and will be gone by mid-June; encourage beneficial insects such as lady beetles and lacewings, protect good bugs by avoiding the use of insecticides that can be toxic to a broad range of insects; apply insecticidal soap, soap-pyrethrum mixtures, or neem oil

**Learn more about how to identify and get rid of pests on your tomatoes by using the UC Integrated Pest management (IPM) Web site—**

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/selectnewpest.tomatoes.html>

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Reviewed by Jennifer Baumbach, UC Master Gardener Coordinator

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