

Why do my tomatoes have a single brown spot on the bottom of the fruit?
Donna F. Atascadero

By Tami Reece Master Gardener

Your tomatoes most likely have blossom end rot. Blossom end rot starts out as a small light brown or black spot at the blossom end of immature fruit. The affected area gradually expands into a sunken brown or black lesion as the fruit ripens. This disease is not caused by a pathogen or pest nor does it spread from plant to plant in your garden.

Blossom end rot results from a low level of calcium in the fruit and water balance in the plant. It is aggravated by high salt content or low soil moisture and is more common in sandier soils. It is especially prevalent when rapidly growing plants are exposed suddenly to a period of drought. Amending your soil with compost, when planting, is the best way to improve your soil structure for holding oxygen, water and nutrients. To reduce the chance of rot, monitor soil moisture to make sure that the root zone neither dries out nor remains saturated. A good drip system, watering your vegetables in the mornings, will help to ensure adequate soil moisture levels. Mulching around your plants will also help with moisture retention. Follow recommended rates for fertilizers as over fertilizing can cause elevated salt levels in the soil. Use of fertilizers low in nitrogen, but high in phosphorus, such as 4-12-4 or 5-10-10 will help in correcting the problem of blossom end rot.

Although differences exist among varieties with respect to susceptibility to blossom end rot, there are no varieties developed as of yet, to have shown a useful resistance. There is no substitute for proper treatment of the soil, to maintain adequate supplies of water and calcium. If your fruits have blossom end rot, pick, discard in your compost pile and wait for the next fruit to set. With good moisture control and proper fertilization you will be enjoying the fruits of your labor soon with a sweet, ripe, juicy tomato!

Contact the University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners: at 781-5939 from 1 to 5 p.m. on Monday and Thursday in San Luis Obispo; at 473-7190 from 10 a.m. to noon on Wednesday in Arroyo Grande; and at 434-4105 from 9 a.m. to noon on Wednesday in Templeton. Visit the UCCE Master Gardeners Web site at groups.ucanr.org/slomg/ or e-mail mgsanluisobispo@ucdavis.edu