

Gardening corner

August can be a confusing time for tomato growers

BY LIZ DOUVILLE
For The Bulletin

Readers who have followed the gardening column over the years know it must be mid-August. Mid to late August has turned into the traditional time to talk about tomato problems. For many readers it is a review and for new tomato growers it might be an awareness to a problem you may be having.

Tomatoes got off to a slow start this year. The temperature range was inconsistent when we were thinking of putting out starts. We had normal temperatures for a short period, then almost two weeks of 100-degree weather which confused the plants, as well as the gardener.

Tomato plants grow best when the temperatures are under 90 degrees. When the temperature reaches temperatures above that range, blossom set slows down. Watering may also be a reason the blossom set is minimal. Tomatoes have a deep root system and need deep watering. Shallow watering can weaken the root system and the ability to produce blossoms. Avoid watering daily. Best practice is to water deeply several times a week to allow root systems to grow strong.

What can go wrong and right

This year I experienced blossom-end rot at the beginning of the season. Blossom-end rot shows itself as a gray to black spot on the blossom end (opposite the stem) of the tomato. It can develop on the green fruit as well as the ripe. The condition is caused due to deficiency in the uptake of calcium, which is in the soil. Moisture stress either

from very wet or very dry conditions contribute to how the calcium is delivered to the plant. More fertilizer would not be the answer. Tomatoes are not heavy feeders. Low nitrogen (the first number of a fertilizer formula) is applied at planting and again when tomatoes need the extra energy to set fruit.

Fruit cracks or tomato splitting is also a problem caused by our generosity with water. Sometimes I think we are our own worst garden enemy. I know that on those days of over 100, I was sure the tomatoes in the greenhouse needed more water when what they really needed was an improved cooling system. The sudden uptake of water causes internal fruit tissues to grow faster than the skin, causing the skin to crack or split. The fruit is still edible.

Catfacing is a term used to describe misshapen fruit with irregular bulges at the blossom end and bands of leathery scar tissue. Cold weather at the time of blossom set distorts and kills certain cells that should develop into fruit, resulting in the deformities. Most common in the large-fruited "beefsteak" tomatoes.

Zippering is a thin, dark line connecting the stem and blossom ends that develops on the fruit. It is caused by poor pollination due to cold temperatures.

Physiological leafroll sounds and looks alarming. Leafroll occurs when the edges of the leaves roll upward and inward.



Sometimes it may curl to the opposite side. It is a self-defense method of preventing further water loss.

Leafroll does not reduce plant growth, yield, or fruit quality. It is believed to result from irregular water supply and may be intensified following pruning. The symptoms may be temporary, but can persist throughout the growing season.

The underlying fear of all tomato growers is that we wake up to discover we have had a visit from a tomato hornworm, the caterpillar of the five-spotted hawkmoth (*Manduca quinquemaculata*) also known as the hummingbird or sphinx moth. Hornworms look like a mini prehistoric monster, are up to 5 inches long bright green with a black horn on its posterior. They feed on the leaves and can defoliate an entire plant.

I have also found them on the fruit. They are masters of camouflage, blending extremely well with the plant. Be sure and look under the

leaves. The tell-tale sign, in addition to the damage, is the black frass (droppings) on the leaves. The control measure is to handpick and destroy.

Local climate a benefit, too

We complain about our short and sometimes difficult growing season but we need to keep in mind our positive points. We have a minimum amount of slugs and snails, which usually have arrived in a plant we purchased. Our humidity is so low that we aren't plagued with the variety of plant viruses and fungal diseases that other areas have to manage. That in itself is a big plus.

A big myth that still circulates is that to ripen a tomato you place it on the window sill in the sunshine. The best method is to leave it on the countertop but out of the sun and please don't refrigerate them. They will do much better in an attractive bowl or a basket lined with a paper towel.

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ANNIVERSARY



Submitted photo

Carlos and Gwenn Wysling of Bend celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary on Aug. 20. The couple were married Aug. 20, 1992, at the Brazilian Room in the Berkeley Hills in California. They have traveled to 30 countries in their three decades together. They have lived in Central Oregon for 15 years.

Milestones

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ALASKA: CALL OF THE WILD
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AUGUST 17-23, 2023

- DAY 1: ARRIVE ANCHORAGE
- DAY 2: ANCHORAGE, RAIL JOURNEY, DENALI NATIONAL PARK
- DAY 3: DENALI NATIONAL PARK, TUNDRA WILDERNESS TOUR
- DAY 4: DENALI, SEWARD
- DAY 5: SEWARD, GLACIER & WILDLIFE CRUISE
- DAY 6: SEWARD AS YOU WISH, DAY AT LEISURE
- DAY 7: SEWARD, ANCHORAGE, FLIGHT HOME

HIGHLIGHTS

- Anchorage
- 2 Nights In Denali
- 3 Nights in Seward
- Domed Rail Journey
- Denali Nat'l Park
- Tundra Wilderness Tour
- Mt. McKinley
- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Glacier & Wildlife Cruise
- Seward

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- Roundtrip Airfare - PDX or RDM (+\$250pp)
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- 6 Nights First Class Hotel Accommodations
- Deluxe Motorcoach Transportation
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- 10 Meals: 6B, 2L & 2D
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- Baggage Handling at all Hotels & Lodges

ACCOMMODATIONS:

- 1 Night: Hilton or Sheraton, Anchorage
- 2 Nights: Denali Park Village or Denali Bluffs, Denali
- 3 Nights: Windsong Lodge or The Gateway of the
- Harbour 360, Seward
- On some dates alternate hotels may be used

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