

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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*“Common Leaf Spot Diseases on Tomato Plants”*

It is getting to be that time of year when tomato plant leaves will begin to show signs of leaf-spot diseases if they have not already. Brown spots on the leaves indicate Septoria leaf and blight. Septoria leaf typically shows earlier in the season than early blight and produces small dark spots. The spots made by early blight are much larger and often have a distorted target pattern of concentric circles.

Those leaves that are heavily infected will turn yellow and drop, with older leaves being more susceptible than young leaves because the disease starts at the bottoms of the plant and works its way up. Plants can be made less vulnerable by mulching, caging or staking to keep them off the ground. Better air circulation allows foliage to dry quicker than on plants that are allowed to sprawl. With applied mulch, this will help water from splashing off of the dirt layer as it hits. This splashing can carry spores on to plants.

If you have the capacity, one option is to rotate the location of tomatoes each year to an area that has not had tomatoes or related crops (peppers, potatoes, eggplant) for several years. This rotation can be beneficial, especially in areas that have shown signs of disease in the past. Even if you have not had disease issues, this rotation method can still serve as a quality preventative measure.

However, rotating your crops around may not always be a feasible option. If this is the case you can utilize a fungicide. When applying, be sure to cover both the upper and lower leaf surfaces, and reapply if rainfall removes the fungicide. Your plants will 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 zero-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, Bonide Fungonil and others. These recommendations are not to serve as a promotion of any particular name brand, but merely as examples of different products available on the market.

As with most plant disease issues, it is easier to work on a preventative basis. Start protecting plants before these diseases are first seen if they have been a problem in the past. It is virtually impossible to control these diseases on heavily infected plants.

Information comes from K-State University Horticulture Specialist, Ward Upham.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.