

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener  
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Here are some common problems we can all have growing tomatoes. Some are caused by insects and some are caused by weather and most are caused by us.

If you have blossoms and no fruit, it could be either too much nitrogen in your soil or the nights are too cold. Flowers drop off if the nights are colder than 55 degrees F or even if the day temperature goes higher than 90 degrees F. If the weather is not the cause, hold off on the fertilizer for a while and see if you start getting more fruit. As to the weather – it will change and you will get new blossoms.

Catfacing – this is a deformity of the fruit caused by cold injury to your tomato flower buds. The tomatoes are edible and later fruit should be fine. Try to wait until all danger of frost is gone before planting your tomatoes out.

Blossom-End Rot – this is caused by a lack of calcium which is related to uneven soil moisture. You can use a bit of powdered milk in your tomato watering but you should water evenly and deeply and remember that tomato plants in pots dry out faster and need more frequent watering. Mulching will also help retain the moisture.

Sunscald – leathery type patches on the side of the tomatoes facing or exposed to the sun. To prevent this don't take off the leaves that shade the tomatoes and add a bit of nitrogen to your soil to promote leaf growth. The undamaged parts of the tomato can be eaten safely.

Tomato Hornworm – with these critters you will find deep holes chewed in the tomatoes and you may find caterpillars – handpick these ugly critters off the plants and do that daily. Bt works on the caterpillars. Undamaged parts of the tomato are edible. The hornworm is rarely found in Western Washington.

Cracked fruit – cracks in fruit around stem, especially in cherry sized tomatoes. Most of this can be prevented by picking the fruit when it ripens and by even, deep watering.

As you can see, prevention is a big part of growing good healthy tomatoes. Even watering, mulching, correct fertilizer. Pick when ripe, and most of all pay attention to what is happening in your garden. If you can catch the problem before it takes over you can correct the problem a lot easier.

Happy gardening!

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.

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