WHY BLOSSOMS OF SOME VEGETABLES FAIL TO SET

There are plenty of flowers on your plants, but you're not getting any fruit... no tomatoes, no squash, no full ears of corn, no pumpkins, and no melons.

What is the problem? The flowers have not been pollinated properly. They have either not been pollinated, at all, have been pollinated under the wrong conditions, or pollination has been insufficient.

Keep reading to find out why and solutions to the problem.

CORN:

Sweet corn is wind pollinated and will produce best when the plants are grown in a block of at least 4 rows. This encourages the transfer of pollen from the tassels (male flowers) to the silks (female flower stigmas). Stress factors such as drought or high temperatures (100 degrees F or more) may result in display gaps on the cob (missing kernels).

TOMATOES:

Tomatoes are self-fertilizing, in that their flowers have both male and female organs. Unfavorable weather conditions are the primary reason for blossom drop on tomatoes. Optimum fruit set occurs within a very narrow night temperature range of between 60 degrees F & 70 degrees F. When tomato plants experience night temperatures lower than 55 degrees F or above 75 degrees F, interference with the growth of pollen tubes prevents normal fertilization. High daytime temperatures, rain, or prolonged humid conditions also hamper good fruit production. Pollen is mostly shed between 10 am and 4 pm on dry, sunny days.

To aid pollination, gently shake or vibrate the entire tomato plant. Perform this operation at midday when temperatures are warm and the humidity is somewhat low. You can also hand pollinate with a Q-tip or a small, soft paintbrush, moving from flower to flower.

PEPPERS AND EGGPLANT experience pollination problems similar to tomatoes.
C UCUMBERS, MELON, PUMPKINS AND SQUASH:

The majority of these vine crops have male and female blossoms on the same plant. Some cucumber hybrid varieties possess only all-female blossoms. Look for straight stemmed male blossoms first. The female blossoms will follow, usually growing further out on the vine and larger in size.

An indication of poor pollination may be an abundance of blossoms, with little or no fruit development. In this case, hand pollination can be utilized by physically transferring the male pollen into the female flowers. This can be done via a paintbrush, Q-tip or direct contact using the male flower.

T HE IMPORTANCE OF BEES

Bees, both native and the European Honeybee, are the perfect pollinators. Their longstanding relationship with plants makes them perfectly adapted to recognize flowers and collect pollen. We need to protect bees and encourage their presence in our yards and gardens. By planting flowers such as sunflowers, zinnias, cosmos and borge among your vegetables, you attract bees and other pollinators, thereby increasing the chance of pollination.

Use extreme caution when applying insecticides in your landscape. Follow label instructions carefully and apply in the evening as this is the time when bees are less likely to be active.