

Late Blight (Phytophthora infestans)



Figure 1 Late blight tomato leaf



Figure 2 Late blight on tomato fruit

Damage

The first symptom of late blight is pale or dark green areas on leaves and stems of infected plants. These enlarge and become brownish black, water soaked, and oily looking. The fruit on late-blight affected tomato plants develop large, sunken golden-to-chocolate brown spots with distinctive rings. Potato tubers from plants affected by late blight develop sunken areas with a reddish brown discoloration under the skin. If the weather is cool and wet, the entire plant can collapse and die within 7 to 10 days.

When Active

Spores are active in cool, wet environments and periods of dry heat help to slow the progression of the disease. Spores can be spread into an area on prevailing winds, or introduced on infected plants e.g. tomato seedlings, seed potatoes that are brought into an area for sale at local garden centers or other retail outlets as well as on plant materials kept through the winter.

Susceptible Plants

Many varieties of tomatoes and potatoes are susceptible, as are eggplants and peppers but to a lesser degree.

Prevention Methods

It is impossible to save plants infected with late blight. Dispose of any volunteer tomato and potato plants that emerge in the spring; they are potential sources of late blight infection. Purchase certified seed potatoes from a reliable supplier and avoid using tubers saved from a previous year's potato crop. Purchase tomato seedlings from reliable growers, and consider tomato varieties with late blight resistance.

Treatment Methods

Pull affected plants (roots and all) and seal them in plastic bags for trash pick-up. Diseased plants or plant parts should not be left in your garden plot or dumped in common compost areas. Fungicides that contain copper can help to reduce impacts of late blight, but application must be before initial symptoms of the disease.

Additional Information/Resources

- [UW Extension Bulletin A4052-01 Tomato Late Blight](#)
- [UW Extension Garden Fact Sheet XHT1195 Late Blight](#)
- Dane County UW Extension Horticulture Hotline 608-224-3721 (M-F 9 a.m.-12 noon, April 15-October 31) or horticulture@countyofdane.com