

Blossom End Rot

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I had my first one brought into the office mid last week. It was a lovely little cherry tomato, almost fully ripe. But the bottom half of the tomato - the blossom end or the end opposite the stem, was black and shrunken in, kind of looking like it was rotten. This was a classic case of blossom end rot of tomatoes. The treatment for this, is patience. Just wanted to get that out there right now. This is not a disease, it is a physiological condition. I told the person that brought this tomato in to me that it was the equivalent of osteoporosis in tomatoes. It was caused by a calcium deficiency. But here's where it gets tricky. You see, our soils have plenty of calcium. For crying out loud, most of them are sitting on top of limestone! Now think of a young teenage boy. He doesn't grow equally at the same time. That's exactly what is happening with the tomato plant. Right now it is growing faster than it's roots can keep up. Even though there is plenty of calcium in the soil, the plant can't move enough calcium to the fruit to keep the fruit from rotting on the bottom. If it is dry, water regularly. We do know that soil moisture fluctuations make blossom end rot worse. If the tomato is big enough, you can cut out the bad portion and eat the rest. But normally, just being patient for a couple of weeks, while the plant gets itself into better balance, will take care of the problem. I know it's frustrating. You've been waiting for that first fresh tomato from your home garden. And you've watched it form and grow and now it's rotting from the bottom up. Hang in there, it'll be better soon. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Potato and Onion Harvest

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Once we move into July, we can usually start planning to harvest onions and potatoes. Onions are ready to harvest when about half the plants have tops that have fallen over. This is a sign that the onions are mature and need to be pulled out of the ground. Bulbs may sunburn without the foliage to protect them. The secret to onions keeping well is to allow the tops to dry completely before storage. Move onions to a shaded, well-ventilated area after harvest. After tops are completely dry, store in a cool, dry location. Large-necked onions take more time to dry than small-necked onions such as Bermuda types. Be patient as rainy humid weather will slow down the drying process. Avoid storage in plastic bags because the lack of air circulation will shorten storage life. Use an open, mesh bag instead. Garlic can be treated very much the same way as onions. Potatoes are ready to harvest when the vines are about half dead. Potatoes dug too early have tender skins and are easily bruised. Delaying digging will allow the soil to heat because it is no longer shaded by foliage. High soil temperatures can lead to sprouting potatoes. Allow potatoes to "set" by keeping them in a shady, dry location for a day or so. Move them to a cool, moist environment such as a cellar or cool basement for longer storage. There is a tendency to be in a hurry to harvest potatoes because everyone loves "new" potatoes. If you want to harvest some early, for new potatoes, go ahead. But as long as the vines are green, let them keep growing for more and bigger potatoes! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Mosquitoes

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In case you haven't noticed, the mosquito population in this area has exploded! After nine plus inches of rain in June this should be no surprise to anyone. Mosquitoes like shallow calm water, especially with emerged vegetation, to breed in. They don't breed in large lakes, they breed in bird baths and pet water bowls that aren't changed routinely. They breed in gutters that don't drain completely. They breed in saucers under flower pots. They breed in old tires, empty tin cans and shallow puddles in the middle of low lying lawns. In normal summer weather, it only takes about 7 to 10 days for a mosquito to go from egg to biter! Too many homeowners focus on controlling the adults. They want to spray or fog their yard or their neighborhood to get rid of the swarming menace. But of the 3 or 4 ways to deal with mosquitoes, this is the least effective, partially in part because mosquitoes, especially larger mosquitoes, will fly over 1/4 mile from a resting place to get a blood meal. The first step is to deal with breeding areas. Eliminating breeding areas now, will help reduce mosquitoes 2 to 4 weeks from now. You can spray around your yard for adults. Use a general lawn and garden insecticide and focus on shrubs and small trees. The most important thing you can do though is to protect yourself. Use DEET based repellents on skin. Many people try many other homeopathic repellents, but none have ever been shown to be anywhere close to as effective as DEET. Avoid being outside in calm evenings and mornings, and wear long sleeves and pants to reduce skin exposure. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420

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