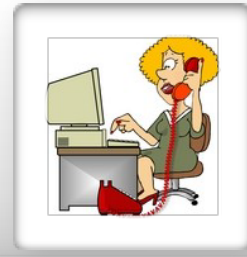


From the VCE- Bedford Master Gardener HELP DESK



*A monthly Bedford Area Master Gardener Association (BAMGA) newsletter column
July 2014 Now available at the BAMGA website for interested gardeners, like you! Editor: LindaE*

The following are a few questions that have come into the Bedford VCE Office MG Help Desk in July within the past few years.

QUESTIONS:

1. A client contacted the Help Desk wondering whether shredded paper, i.e. statements, bills, computer paper, can be used as mulch.

2. A client brought in weed that looks like a jade plant that is creeping all over garden and lawn. He wanted it identified and recommendations for getting rid of it.

3. A client called and said he has blossom end rot on his tomatoes and indicated he has used Epsom salt and lime. He mentioned his plants had some early blight and that he had removed lower limbs of the plant. He asked for guidance and/or solutions for both of these problems.



ANSWERS:

1. The client was told that as long as the ink is black and white (no color) and soy based those types of papers could be used as mulch. Generally speaking, however, shredded paper is usually used in composting. On the other hand, three layers of newspaper sheets as the first barrier layer in flower or vegetable gardens are better for weed suppression. [1]

2. The 'weed' was identified as Purslane, which is a summer annual. The recommendation was to use 2, 4-D + Dicamba on weeds. The client was also advised that the seeds will remain in soil so he should treat early next spring. In addition, a soil test was recommended and suggested to amend the lawn/soil as indicated by the test results. The client was reminded that,



Purslane OregonState.edu

“Healthy lawn grass is the most powerful weed prevention available. Practices that promote turf grass health are required for successful weed management in the lawn. In fact, most weed problems in Virginia can be attributed to a single mistake made by most homeowners: mowing the lawn too short. No other cultural input for lawns exceeds the effort given to mowing, so mowing correctly is critical for optimal turf grass health and performance.” [2]

3. **Blossom end rot** is a physiological disorder of tomato fruits that affects both greenhouse and field grown plants. Blossom end rot occurs more frequently when plants grown under favorable conditions early in the season are subjected to long periods of drought during the early stages of fruit development. However, it can also occur after periods of unusually heavy rainfall. Losses from this disorder vary from negligible to severe, depending on the environmental conditions. Blossom end rot also affects peppers and eggplant.



BER ohioline.osu.edu

Calcium deficiency has been shown to be a contributing factor to the occurrence of blossom end rot. Failure of sufficient calcium to reach the blossom end of the fruit early in fruit development causes the cells in this area to die. Many of the factors

that contribute to this physiological process are not known; however, it has been shown that pathogenic organisms are not involved.

Cultural controls for Blossom End Rot include:

- Maintaining a uniform supply of soil moisture by watering plants during drought and mulching to retain soil moisture;
- Avoiding using excessive amounts of ammonia forms of nitrogen, which reduce calcium uptake. Use nitrate forms of nitrogen instead. Avoid over fertilization during early fruiting;
- Applying light applications of fertilizers high in superphosphate will aid in reducing blossom end rot; and
- Maintaining a soil pH of approximately 6.5. Liming helps supply calcium.

Chemical controls would be foliar applications of calcium. However, they are not always effective. Apply calcium chloride as a spray if the soil is deficient in calcium and blossom end rot begins to develop. Use 4 teaspoons of 96% calcium chloride per gallon of water. Sprays should be applied at weekly intervals until 3 or 4 applications have been made. Prolonged applications of calcium chloride may cause marginal leaf burn. [3]

Early blight of tomatoes is caused by the fungus *Alternaria solani*, and is one of the most common diseases of tomatoes in Virginia. It occurs to some extent every year wherever tomatoes are grown. In spite of its name, the disease may occur at any time during the growing season. The fungus attacks leaves, stems and fruit. It can also cause disease on potato, pepper, and eggplant.

The client was advised that there are both cultural and chemical controls available.

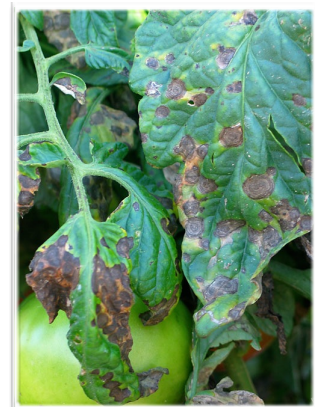


Photo: Early Blight of Tomatoes

longislandhort.cornell.edu/vegpath/photos/early_blight.htm

Cultural controls for Early Blight include:

- Obtain the best certified seed or transplants. Prevention of seedling infection is very important.

- Practice crop rotation. Tomatoes should not be planted in areas where susceptible vegetables, such as tomato, potato, pepper, or eggplant, have been grown during the previous three or four years.
- Destroy solanaceous weeds, such as black nightshade or Jerusalem cherry, which can serve as hosts of the fungus.
- Space transplants to allow good air circulation, thereby permitting plants to dry off rapidly after rain and dews. This will reduce the risk of disease development.
- Plow under or remove old vines as soon as harvest is completed.

Chemical controls include applying a fungicide, such as chlorothalonil (e.g. Daconil 2787) or maneb (e.g. Maneb), on a preventative basis. Follow label rates or consult the current *Virginia Pest Management Guide for Home Grounds and Animals* (VCE Publication 456-018) for details on fungicide control. And lastly, the client was told that tomato cultivars vary in their resistance to the disease. The cultivars, Mountain Fresh, Mountain Supreme, and Plum Dandy have resistance to early blight. [4]

REFERENCES:

[1] <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/450/450-708/450-708.html> (accessed 5/23/2014)

Submitted by,

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Bedford Help Desk Coordinator*

Answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions.

These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances.

For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

Bedford County Extension Office: (540) 586-7675 / **Email:** Help Desk @ BedfordMG@vt.edu

Local Extension Websites: www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org and <http://offices.ext.vt.edu/bedford/>

Bedford Area Extension Master Gardeners Association (BAMGA) is also on Facebook and Twitter

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