

# Ask Dr. Vege – Blossom End Rot

Blossom end rot is primarily seen on tomato plants but can also be an issue with peppers and eggplant.

- Blossom end rot is not caused by fungi, bacteria or viruses. Its primary cause is a calcium insufficiency in the tomato fruit itself. Calcium is absorbed through the root system but must have water for the movement of the nutrient upward to the fruits. When dry conditions occur, calcium cannot be transported from the soil to the developing tomatoes.
  - Insufficient calcium issues can also occur if the plants grow too rapidly. The vascular system cannot keep up with the rapid growth and cannot supply all the calcium that is needed. Over fertilization is the major cause of too rapid growth.
- Blossom end rot first presents as a water-soaked spot on the bottom end of a tomato. As the tissue breaks down, the area becomes sunken and turns dark brown or black. This can happen at any time of the growing season but is usually seen on the first tomato fruits of the year.
  - Remove infected fruits to encourage the plant to produce new tomatoes and correct watering practices. Blossom end rot does not spread from plant to plant or fruit to fruit. It is a purely a calcium transportation issue. Subsequent fruits will likely be perfectly and delicious.
- Preventing blossom end rot.
  - Plant tomatoes in well-drained soil with good amounts of organic matter (compost).
  - Use a good quality vegetable fertilizer to side dress when plants begin to bloom.
  - Mulch around plants to conserve moisture and decrease the need for deep weeding. Disturbing the soil repeatedly for weeding increases the drying out of the soil.
  - Tomatoes, like most plants, need one inch of water per week, more when temperatures are high. Supplement rainfall with irrigation aimed at the root zone, not the foliage.



Blossom End Rot

Happy gardening! Alaine Bush, Advanced Master Gardener