



Disease Control No. TDC2

Early blight, *Alternaria solani*

Early blight affects potatoes and tomatoes. It is a widespread disease in the tropics and warmer temperate areas.

Symptoms

The first signs of early blight are small black spots on leaves. These spots gradually increase in size producing a more or less circular spot made of ridged circular bands. Veins of leaves may limit the growth of the spot and so it may take on an angular shape.

Early blight is sometimes confused with late blight (*Phytophthora infestans*). Late blight lesions are lighter, smaller and they do not have the circular ridged bands that early blight has.

Description of disease

The disease spreads using spores which are dispersed by wind and rain. The fungus requires hot and showery weather to develop. Older leaves are more susceptible although young tomato plants are also severely affected.

Prevention and control

Controlling blight once it has taken over is very difficult. The most important ways of controlling late blight is attempting to prevent it's spread.

- When watering the crops, do not water the leaves. Water at the base of the plant or water through a tube which should be pushed diagonally into the ground to reach the roots. If the leaves are infected, wetting them will help the disease to spread and will also spread the disease to the ground where, in the case of potatoes, it will infect the tubers.
- Remove and burn infected areas as soon as infection is detected.
- Avoid planting new plots alongside old ones, where the disease can spread from.
- Plant plots where potatoes or tomatoes have been growing with other plants which are not susceptible to late blight, to decrease the survival of the disease in the plant debris.
- Clean and preferably disinfect seeds.

Produced by the Tropical Advisory Service, June 2000

HDRA - the organic organisation, Ryton Organic Gardens Coventry, CV8 3LG, UK
Tel: +44 (0)24 7630 3517 Fax: +44 (0)24 7663 9229 Email: ove-enquiry@hdra.org.uk
Website: <http://www.hdra.org.uk>

This leaflet is a compilation of scientific research and farmers' experiences from various sources. The information given does not necessarily comply with international organic standards. A list of the sources and other publications on organic farming are available from HDRA. This material may be reproduced freely for non-profit making purposes. We are thankful for the support of the Charlton Community Development Trust in the production of this leaflet.