



Dealing with tomato blossom drop or poor fruit set

For many vegetable gardeners, nothing says summertime quite like a vine-ripened tomato. While it's still a bit early for tomato harvest, gardeners should be seeing evidence of good things to come.

So, what should gardeners do who are experiencing poor fruit set or blossom drop? This happens for a number of reasons. In some cases, the tomato plants don't set fruit well when the night temperature is below about 60 degrees Fahrenheit or above 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Fruit also doesn't set well when the daytime temperature is consistently above about 92 degrees Fahrenheit. When these conditions occur, flowers will drop or fruit will be misshapen.

To help alleviate the issue, there are some hormone-type "blossom set" sprays available that can reduce spring bloom drop from low night temperatures. Keep in mind, these sprays have little effect on the set of tomatoes during high temperature conditions. Another tip is to avoid excessive nitrogen fertilization. Excessive nitrogen in the soil often promotes leaf growth at the expense of blossom and fruit formation.

Dry soils also can lead to blossom drop - blossoms dry and fall when the plants don't receive enough water. Root damage can lead to decreased intake of moisture.

In addition, too much shade can result in only a few blossoms when the plants receive less than six hours of sunlight a day.

To help overcome some issues related to growing tomatoes:

- Plant early, mid- and late-season varieties at the appropriate time of year.
- Grow tomatoes in well-drained soil that's high in organic matter.
- Water tomatoes regularly, never allowing the soil to dry out; mulch with straw, black plastic or other material to reduce moisture loss.
- Plant tomatoes in an area that receives at least six hours of sunlight each day. If the yard is too shady, plant the tomatoes in a container and set them on a sunny porch or patio.
- Reduce nitrogen applications if necessary. Be sure to follow the fertilizer application recommendations.

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