

Blossom End Rot

Tomato growers in Kentucky should be on the lookout for blossom-end rot (BER), a disorder that can dramatically reduce both quality and quantity of tomato fruit. By using a few simple irrigation and fertilization practices, damage due to BER can be prevented or reduced. Blossom-end rot is a physiological disorder, not a disease. It is easily identified as a brown, leathery rot developing on or near the blossom-end of the fruit. It starts with a dry brown lesion the size of a dime, generally increasing in diameter as the condition worsens. In time, lesions often become covered with a black mold.

BER is caused by calcium deficiency, usually induced by fluctuations in the plant's water supply. Because calcium is not a highly "mobile" element in the plant, even brief changes in the water supply can cause BER. Droughty soil or damage to the roots from excessive or improper cultivation (severe root pruning) can restrict water intake preventing the plants from getting the calcium that they need. Also, if plants are grown in containers on porches and patios they tend to be more susceptible to



damage due to extreme variation in soil moisture. To help control BER you can take the following steps:

- Plant with an organic granular fertilizer such as Tomato-tone. These type of fertilizers have calcium in them and can help keep calcium levels up in your soil.

- Use mulches to conserve moisture. Mulches conserve soil

moisture and reduce incidence of BER.

- Give your plants adequate water. Tomato plants need about 1.5 inches of water per week during fruiting. Extreme fluctuations in soil moisture can result in a greater incidence of BER. (Plants grown above ground in containers have a tendency to dry out more frequently and should be checked daily)

- Growing the right tomato in containers can help reduce the likelihood of developing BER. When growing a plant in a container it is best to use a determinate tomato variety instead of an indeterminate

- If your plants develop BER, spray them with calcium. You should spray 2 or 3 times each week, beginning when the second fruit clusters are blooming. Spraying calcium is not a substitute for proper irrigation and fertility management.

- If you experience severe problems with BER, you should remove the infected fruits. Once a fruit develops BER it will not regrow or repair the infected area. Remove the fruit, otherwise the damaged area could serve as an entry point for disease causing bacteria or fung



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