

Vegetable Gardening in MS

The reward of growing your own food is something everyone should experience firsthand. Nothing compares to a home cooked meal prepared with vegetables that were grown in your garden. Okra, squash, cucumber, peas, and tomatoes are a few of the staple items in most Mississippi gardens. Growing your own vegetables can be rewarding, but it does require a little hard work. Besides, if we remember what our parents and grandparents told us, 'a little hard work never hurt no one'.

Last week I wrote about the problems we can encounter in our lawns. This week I will cover a few of the problems you may run into in your vegetable patch. For some people, growing vegetables is as easy as planting the seed and watching it grow until harvest. For most of us it requires a little more time and effort, and even then we can have problems.

Many vegetables grow each year without much problem. Okra, squash, cucumber, and peas are some of the less troublesome ones. Tomatoes, however, are another story. Nine out of ten vegetable calls that come into the Extension office are about sick or dying tomatoes. While tomatoes are a wonderful plant, they are susceptible to many problems. This is not a reason to forgo planting them; it's definitely worth the risk.

Blossom-end Rot is possibly the most common problem seen in tomatoes. This is when the blossom-end (bottom) of the fruit gets brown, water-soaked areas. It is caused by a shortage of calcium in the fruit which is due to improper watering. It also can appear in plants that have received too much nitrogen fertilizer. The best cure is to water regularly and not let the soil dry out completely. A mulch layer in the garden may help to retain soil moisture.

Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus is another problem we encounter with tomatoes. Leaves in the top of the plant begin to wilt after an excessive amount of rainfall or irrigation, and can move throughout the entire plant within a single day. If you've ever had a plant die overnight, this may have been the culprit. It usually occurs in soils that drain poorly, so be sure to have a garden that drains well. This can be accomplished by incorporating organic matter such as leaves, clippings, compost, or soil conditioner. Raised beds also work well with all vegetables.

Early Blight is another problem you may come across. Dark brown to black rings may appear on the older, lower leaves giving a target effect. Providing good air circulation around the plant and not watering too late in the day may help avoid this situation.

Growing vegetables can be a worthwhile experience if you follow a few simple tips. They like to grow in full sun in well-drained soils. They need about 2 inches of water per week while they are producing. They need to receive this water at regular intervals, not all at once. There may even be times when you must spray with a fungicide or insecticide to keep pests from eliminating your crop. If so, always follow the directions on the label.

If you have any questions, please contact your local county Extension office at (662) 328-2111 or visit our website at <http://msucares.com> for answers.

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