



Tips for Pest-Free Tomatoes

Keep your tomato plants pest-free this summer by monitoring tomato pest activity--and try these tips for an organic approach.

America's favorite backyard crop is a favorite food for pests as well! You'll want to monitor your tomato plants for pest activity throughout the growing season.

Here are some tips, especially for those interested in an organic approach: Pay attention to the labels on the packets of the tomato seeds you plant: Disease-resistant tomatoes are marked with combinations of letters: V for Verticillium wilt; F for Fusarium wilt; N for nematodes; T for tobacco Mosaic virus; and A for alternaria (early blight). Plant resistant varieties to help ward off problems before they start.

Look for tomatoes that yield early; they'll offer mid-season harvests that avoid late-summer fungal diseases. Also, consider heritage varieties common to your area that may have natural resistance to some pests.

Stop fungal diseases before they attack the entire plant by rotating crops away from previous seasons' fungal spots: pluck off yellowing leaves from the bottom of the plant taking care not to touch healthy foliage; burn or throw the diseased foliage out with the garbage. allow space for circulation around plants and water their roots, not their leaves.

Lure slugs away from tomato plants by burying a pie tin filled with beer; bury the tin at ground level and a fair distance from the garden.

Pluck fierce-looking hornworms and toss them into a pail of soapy water -- they're easiest to spot in the morning before they seek shade from the sun.

If you see a hornworm with rows of white rice-like spikes on its back, leave it alone; the white bits are the larvae of a parasitic wasp that will eventually kill the caterpillar.

~ Excerpts from "Classic Crops" by Andy Tomolomis found in Popular Farming™ Series Organic Farm, now available for purchase online.