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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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BLOSSOM-END ROT OF TOMATOES

It is that time of year when we are beginning to harvest the fine looking vegetables we have been growing in our home garden. It is also stressful for many of us when we reach for that tomato that we have been watching develop and realize that it is rotten on the bottom. Blossom-end rot is a major problem for many home gardeners. There are several things we can do to reduce or prevent the problems of blossom-end rot.

Blossom-end rot of tomatoes is a physiological disorder caused by a lack of sufficient calcium in the blossom end of the fruit. This problem results in the decay of tomato fruits on the blossom-end. This disorder is usually most severe following extremes in soil moisture.

To reduce the incidence of blossom-end rot in tomatoes, implement the following steps. Check the pH of your garden soil. The ideal pH of a garden soil should be 6.5 to 7. Home gardens not limed in the past 2 to 3 years could probably benefit from an application of lime. Apply 50 to 100 pounds of lime per 1000 square feet to correct soil acidity. To determine the exact amount of lime, send a soil sample to one the soil testing labs.

Applying too much fertilizer at one time can result in blossom-end rot. Following soil test recommendations is the best way to insure proper fertilization.

Mulch the plants with pine straw, decomposed sawdust, plastic, newspapers or compost to help conserve moisture and reduce the problems of blossom-end rot. In extreme drought, plastic may increase blossom-end rot if plants are not watered.

Tomatoes require approximately 1.5 inches of water per week during fruiting. This amount of water should be supplied either by rain or irrigation. Extreme fluctuations in soil moisture result in a greater incidence of blossom-end rot.

The plants may be sprayed with a calcium solution. Use products containing calcium nitrate or calcium chloride. Be sure and follow all label directions. Most of the calcium sprays should be applied at least once per week, beginning at the time the second fruit clusters bloom. These

materials can be mixed with the spray that is used for control of foliar diseases. Several spray materials containing calcium are available and all work well for tomatoes.

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