

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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AVOID COMMON GARDEN PROBLEMS

Every spring, gardeners encounter numerous problems when they raise their own garden fresh vegetables. Problems are to be expected, but many of those experienced almost annually can often be avoided by simply doing the right thing at the right time.

Following is a brief discussion of five of the most common vegetable garden problems which occur in Texas, along with suggestions about how they can be avoided this year and in the future.

This is a common occurrence with beans, peas, vine crops, and sweet corn. It is usually due to soilborne fungi in conjunction with planting in cold, wet soils. Seedlings emerge but grow slowly and develop “weak knees”, causing them to fall over or, to use the correct term, damp-off. Damping-off can be prevented by making certain that you don’t rush planting time and by purchasing seeds that have been treated with a fungicide to prevent disease development. Fungicide-treated seeds are often pink or blue in color and are usually labeled as such on the packet.

Sluggish growth of transplants of tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant can usually be attributed to cold soils and low fertility. Make certain that the soil is warm enough to encourage good growth of these vegetables. Ideally, the temperature should be about 65 to 68 degrees F one inch beneath the surface of the soil. An early warming of the soil can be brought about by mulching with black plastic. To encourage satisfactory early growth of transplants, always use a starter solution or, as it is often called, “root stimulator”. Follow the label directions when mixing and applying the starter solution.

Squash plants that bloom and bloom and bloom, but seldom yield any squash are a common problem in many Texas gardens. This occurrence is usually caused by a lack of pollination. Squash and other vine crops produce both male and female blooms, with the female blooms being those that produce squash. However, the male blooms are vitally important because they supply the pollen necessary for fruit set to occur. Pollinating insects, most importantly bees, must be present to transfer the pollen from the male blooms to the female blooms. If you must spray or dust your vine crops for damaging pests, apply the pesticides during late afternoon to avoid harm to the bees which are most active during the early morning hours.

Contrary to what many gardeners believe, the cause of poorly flavored cantaloupes is not due to their crossing with cucumbers! Off-flavor of cantaloupes is caused by excess water from rain or irrigation

near maturity of the melons. Also, to insure maximum flavor of your melons, keep the plants free of foliage diseases, and harvest when they “full slip” from the vine.

Toward midsummer, gardeners often complain that their once great-tasting cucumbers have begun to develop a bitter flavor. Although this occurrence cannot usually be prevented, it can be delayed. Bitterness of cucumbers is most often associated with old plants, low fertility, inadequate moisture, and high temperatures. Nothing can be done about the age of the plants or the occurrence of the high temperatures always associated with Texas summers. However, maintaining adequate soil moisture by frequent watering and mulching around the plants, along with an occasional light application of fertilizer, will delay or may even prevent the development of bitter fruit.