



TOMATO PROBLEMS

A young member, who has not grown tomatoes in a greenhouse before, sent me the photo of his sad crop. Some were shrivelled and split; others were severely effected by mildew. Why? He asked.



It is all down to greenhouse hygiene, air circulation and watering. Tomato plants need not too much water and never too little, and the balancing act can be difficult to achieve, especially is using shallow growbags (on a hot day it may be necessary to water in the morning and in the late afternoon). I grow my tomatoes in deeper containers which greatly helps avoid watering problems. Our member has let the tomatoes go without water (hence the shrivelling) and then overwatered (hence the splitting and mildew attack via the splits). The problem would not be quite as bad had the vents/door of the greenhouse be used (open on warmer days, close on cooler evenings) to let fresh air circulate.

So next? Clear the greenhouse of every bit of organic matter (pots and containers with compost, plants, dead leaves etc). Use a disinfectant on the paths. Then in late winter (February) sterilise the greenhouse with a sulphur candle (available at the Association's Hut). Don't grow tomatoes in soil beds, if the greenhouse has them. You may use a ring culture, using a sterile compost in the rings (ask in the Hut about this...that is partly what we are there for). Try growbags by all means in 2012, but beware that you must be far more alert when it comes to watering. The big 14" or 16" pots (also in the Hut) have the edge when it comes to watering, but they cost a bit more in compost price to fill the big pots. And, after you put in the tomato plants, on warm days give plenty of ventilation. And if, if, if we ever get a summer like those memories of long ago, when we used the barbecue every evening and quaffed Pimms, cold beer and vats of Chardonnay, the sun may be so strong that the plants in the greenhouse may need some shade (the white paint-on stuff is available at the Hut).

Oh! And don't forget. When the trusses are forming, add a tablespoon of tomato liquid feed to every gallon of water when you are doing the watering, and take away side shoots as soon as they start to grow. Another tip: when the lower trusses are ready to ripen, cut off all leaves below and that hang down over the trusses. That will hasten ripening. And when we get to next backend, and the ripening of the last trusses slows, cut off ALL the leaves. They will ripen more quickly then.

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