

Have you checked your tomato and potato plants today?

There is a wide spread late blight affecting tomato and potato plants throughout the northeastern United States. One major source of late blight was through infected tomato plants sent to large chain stores such as Lowe's, Home Depot, and Walmart this spring. Any tomato plants started from seed locally were not originally infected. The danger of infection now to seed grown tomatoes, such as those sold here at Olney's, is through air-born spores of the blight. This is the same disease that caused the Irish potato famine more than 160 years ago. Tomatoes and potatoes are closely related and are both susceptible to late blight.

Early symptoms of the disease include brown spots on the stems and, under moist growing conditions, white fungal growth which leads to rotting and collapsing of the stems. Infected fruit will develop firm brown spots. Late blight does not create any toxic elements, so any infected fruit is safe to eat except that the affected fruits will be extremely quick to rot. You should not eat or cook with fruit that has already started to rot away.

You should inspect your tomato and potato plants at least once every week. Any infected plants (and fruit) should be carefully rooted out, placed in a **sealed plastic bag**, and sent out with your regular garbage. Please do not leave infected plants or plant parts to over-winter in compost piles since the heat generated by decomposing organic matter may help the disease to survive our winters.

If you wish to try to keep late blight under control with fungicides, begin spraying now, even before you see symptoms, and continue spraying regularly. Use a product containing chlorothalonil. Products that use copper will not be very effective against this blight.

Petunias are closely related to tomatoes and potatoes and may also be infected by late blight. Infected petunias would show similar symptoms.

Please visit the [Cornell University Department of Horticulture site](#) to view pictures of infected [plants](#) and [fruit](#) so you know what to look for. The articles also have more detailed information.