

Something that is disheartening about gardening is having plants die through no fault of your own. This year it is happening to tomatoes in many areas of the county, and along the Wasatch Front. I have had numerous calls from local residents concerning this. It seems that neighborhood sized areas can be affected and then areas adjacent are not.

One thing I have noticed is that it seems more Roma type paste tomatoes are dying at greater rates than other varieties, although other varieties are also declining. The plants seemed to be stunted, turn light green, then yellow with some leaf scorch developing on the leaves, and then they die. This decline happens over in the span of a few weeks.

I initially suspected a viral disease called curly top that is spread by an insect called beet leaf hopper, where I have had reports that leaf hopper pressure has been heavier than normal this year. However, tomato plants are declining faster than I have witnessed in the past with curly top, and there seems to be a lack of optimal root development mixed with some root rot on infected plants. I sent samples off to a Utah State University campus lab to see if they can come to any conclusions, but so far all they can say is that it is not curly top. They are still investigating.

No matter what is going on, there is most likely not a spray treatment to stop the plants from declining or getting infected. It is not fun, but digging infected plants from the garden and throwing them away is all that can be done. Do not compost the infected tomatoes either.

If have heard rumors that some garden centers in Utah County still have tomatoes, but will not for very much longer. If you can find short season varieties such as Early Girl or Fourth of July, you may still have time to replant to get a crop towards the end of the gardening season. There is also still time to plant short season sweet corn and green beans. The time to plant cool season crops for late fall harvest is also quickly approaching. Some of these could be interspersed among the remaining tomatoes.

Even though I am still not certain as to what is causing the relatively widespread tomato decline, it is happening. I wish there was more that could be done. The silver lining in all of this, is that there still should be enough plants around that we can still enjoy locally fresh tomatoes, even if they may not have come from our gardens.