

Report from the Field

Looking back to 2009, the 15 inches of rain in 2 months and cool temperatures we had that caused late blight on our tomatoes and potatoes and killed them, and comparing that with this year, is a bit frightening. The forecast for rain almost every day is worrisome. Fungi thrive in cool, wet weather. In the past, late blight was rarely a problem in CT, but is more often a concern due to increased precipitation. The sun has been breaking through, and the temperatures are a bit warmer than optimal for the dreaded fungus, late blight.

The tomato plant was domesticated from the wild in western South America. Some of the wild relatives of the tomato are resistant to fungal disease that are problems in domesticated tomatoes, while other wild relatives grow in very arid regions, possibly not needing the fungal resistance. Botanists are not sure exactly where or which species it was domesticated from, but it occurred at least 2500 years ago and we may have bred some of the fungal resistance out of them.



These photos show tomatoes in the field, note the lower leaves in the picture on the left. They are withering from fungal disease, early blight and/or septoria. These fungi are in the soil, getting on the plant easier when there are heavy rains that splash the fungal spores up onto the leaves. Wet, cool weather helps the fungi to thrive.



These photos are from in the greenhouse. There are no noticeable signs of fungal disease. This is due to no splashing, no dew, and the higher temperatures we can maintain in the greenhouse. In a normal year we'll get twice the yield out of the greenhouse per unit area. In other years, the greenhouse may be the only place we harvest tomatoes due to disease outside.



Here is our first full size tomato! It is an heirloom, Pruden's Purple, from the greenhouse.



The peas have peaked, and are in decline. This is the last week for them. If you take a look at the plants (half way up the driveway on the left) you'll notice the plants are beginning to yellow.

The peppers are showing signs of improvement since last week; new lush green leaves are growing.

Last week I saw a blob of an insect(s) flying erratically. On further inspection, this is what I found. The white butterflies are Cabbage Butterflies, a male and female. The male is dead, apparently during, umm, copulation. The female Cabbage Butterfly is still alive, although she is in trouble, a Robber Fly has a hold of her and is apparently trying to eat her alive. As bad as it sounds, we are rooting for the Robber Fly; the Cabbage Butterfly is a major pest. In the worm (caterpillar) stage of its life, it consumes broccoli, cabbage, kale, and other plants in the brassica family.

