

Purple Leaves and Twisted Leaves
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Do your tomato or other plant leaves appear purplish? Maybe just the veins are purple or a large portion of the leaves have a purple tint.

Purpling of leaves is often due to a phosphorous deficiency caused by cold soils. Our soils are abundant in phosphorous; however tomatoes and other plants have difficulty taking up phosphorous in cold soil.

Ideal soil temperatures for tomato planting are 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Soil temperatures in our area only reached this level recently. If tomatoes have been planted longer than a week, and are showing leaf purpling, this is likely the cause.

Plants deficient in phosphorous can lose vigor and yield poorly in the long run. Time will tell how well affected tomatoes perform this year.

The best way to avoid this is not to plant warm season vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, vine crops and sweet corn until soil temperatures have warmed to about 60 degrees and the danger of frost has passed.

The average frost free date in our area is May 9. Note this is the average date. We can still have frost after this time, but on average we do not.

Another issue we are seeing is curled or twisted plant leaves. This is often herbicide injury. During spring, when new growth is tender and herbicides are being applied for broadleaf weeds, like dandelions, we receive a number of herbicide injury questions.

The leaves can appear leathery and have very distorted growth. In some cases, depending on the type of herbicide, leaves can also turn white.

To help confirm the cause of distorted growth, check other types of plants in the vicinity. If some of them also have leaf or leaf vein distortion, herbicide drift is most likely the cause. With herbicide drift injury, new growth will appear normal as it emerges.

If no other plant types in the area shows signs of leaf distortion, and new growth continues to be affected; then a virus disease might be the cause. There is no control for viral diseases in plants and infected plants are best destroyed.

At this time of year, herbicide drift is often the cause and it can occur from a fairly long distance when conditions are right.

Drift occurs as particle or vapor. Particle drift happens when small spray droplets travel off-site during periods of high wind and droplets are blown away from the targeted site. To avoid this, use larger spray droplets with low pressure, and apply herbicides only when wind speed is low.

Vapor drift occurs when products volatilize or evaporate and move off site. The volatility of some products increases as temperatures rise into the upper 80s and 90s. Herbicide labels provide information on when it is not safe to apply a product based on temperature or other conditions.

The highest potential for drift is when it is hot and dry; and of course windy. To avoid pesticide drift, always read and follow all label directions. And if edible plants are affected by herbicide, we cannot say they are safe to eat.