



# The Hoe Truth Newsletter

Helping You Grow!

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## Southern Blight of Vegetables

Southern blight, also known as basal stem rot, is a common disease of vegetables, as well as other agronomic and specialty crops. While this fungal disease is capable of infecting a wide range of hosts, the most common vegetables affected include beans, cabbages, cucumbers, peppers, and tomatoes. Plants infected with the southern blight pathogen ultimately die, resulting in yield losses. Use of cultural practices and fungicides can limit damage.

### Southern Blight Facts

- Symptoms are often first observed as the wilting of foliage. Over time, leaves yellow and stems and branches turn brown (Figure 1). Decay of stems and crowns ultimately results in rapid plant death. Infected stems and crowns may exhibit a fuzzy, white growth (mycelia), which is the fungal body of the casual organism. Small, fungal reproductive structures (sclerotia) develop in mycelia. Sclerotia are initially white, but later become tan to brown in color (Figure 2).
- Pathogen structures overwinter in plant debris and infested soil as sclerotia. These structures may survive for up to 5 years.
- Disease development is favored by high temperatures and periods of high humidity.
- Southern blight is caused by the fungal pathogen, *Agroathelia rolfsii* (formerly *Sclerotium rolfsii*).

### Management

- Avoid planting in fields with a history of southern blight.
- Deep till fields and high tunnels with a history of disease.
- Solarize soil in fields and high tunnels.



# Southern Blight Of Vegetables

- Rotate away from susceptible crops.
- Remove and destroy infected plants or plant parts.
- Clean and sanitize tools, pots, and equipment.
- Avoid moving infested soil to clean beds or gardens.
- Remove and destroy plant debris at the end of the season.

Commercial growers can find information on fungicides in the [Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers \(ID-36\)](#) and the [Southeastern U.S. Vegetable Crop Handbook](#). Homeowners should consult [Home Vegetable Gardening \(ID-128\)](#) for fungicide information or contact a county Extension agent for additional information and recommendations regarding fungicides.



Figure 1: Plants affected by southern blight exhibit leaf yellowing and rapid blighting of stems and branches. (Photo: Kenny Seebold, UK).



Figure 2: White mycelia may develop on infected plant parts. Within the mycelium, small round sclerotia develop. (Photo: Kenny Seebold, UK).

## Wheelbarrow Series Classes For August

August 1st: Fall Vegetable Gardening

August 8th: Weed Identification and Control

August 15th: Making Wine Bottle Wind Chimes

August 22nd: Irresistible Iris

# Plant of The Month



'Cherry Mocha'  
BARISTA® Collection  
Crapemyrtle

## Perennial

Hardy in USDA Zones 6A - 9B

- ↑ Height: 2-2½ ft
- ↔ Space: 2-2½ ft
- ☀ More than 6 Hours of Daily Sun
- 💧 Light to Medium Moisture
- 🕒 Blooms Late Summer to Early Fall
- 🦌 Deer Resistant

- Small clusters of cherry red flowers
- Dense, small habit of semi-glossy burgundy foliage
- Attractive green seed pods
- Sun-loving shrub-like perennial
- Prefers well drained soil
- Drought tolerant when established
- Pair with Tickseed, Catmint, Blue Star, Aster



## August Is Iris Dividing Time

Whether you're looking to expand your planting of iris or just need to rejuvenate an older planting, late summer is a good time to lift and divide iris. Dividing every three to five years will help rejuvenate the planting, and encourage more blossoms for the subsequent years.

Most iris plants spread by means of underground stems called rhizomes. Rhizomes become too crowded over time, resulting in reduced flowering. By lifting and dividing the larger clumps, you can rejuvenate the old planting, as well as provide a source of new plants to expand your garden or share with friends. Dig the clumps by inserting a spade around the circumference of the planting. Then insert the spade beneath the clump and lift. Deep spading should not be necessary as iris rhizomes and roots are rather shallow.

Use a sharp knife to cut the younger, outward-growing rhizomes into sections, leaving as many roots and buds on each piece as possible. For ease in replanting, cut the leaves to one-third their original height. Discard the old central portions of the original rhizome, as well as any sections that appear to be diseased or infested with iris borer.

Replant the newly cut sections as soon as possible to avoid excessive drying. Planting depth is important, and this is where most gardeners make their mistake. Iris rhizomes should be placed just below the soil surface with the roots pointing down and the cut leaves upright and exposed to the sun. Firm the soil and water gently and thoroughly. Newly set plants will likely require weekly watering until they establish a new root system.

# Mulch Mushrooms and Other Organisms

Mulches provide numerous benefits in our landscapes, including conserving soil moisture and suppressing weeds, as well as providing a pleasing background to highlight landscape plantings. However, mulch can also provide a perfect growing medium for a diverse group of fungi and slime molds. While gardeners may be alarmed when they see an abundance of mushrooms or a yellow slime mold suddenly spread across their mulch, these organisms often do not infect plants or cause plant diseases. In fact, there's good in that unusual slime mold or odorous stinkhorn.

Saprophytic fungi and slime molds get their nutrients from nonliving organic materials, such as wood mulch and plant residue, and in the process contribute to their decomposition, releasing nutrients back into the soil and improving soil fertility. A variety of saprobes are needed to completely recycle nutrients, so it is advantageous to have a diversity of beneficial saprobes present and growing in your garden. Slime molds, in particular, are indicators of healthy soils with high organic matter.

Mushrooms are the visible reproductive structures of Agaricomycetes fungi, most of which are beneficial (though not always edible). These fungal bodies survive within mulch or soil and go unnoticed for most of the year.

The mushroom phase of their lifecycle usually appears after prolonged periods of rain. Common mulch fungi include tiny *Mycena* mushrooms as well as larger mushrooms. Other fungi have different above-ground reproductive structures that emerge after rainy weather. Some of the most interesting fungi include stinkhorns, puffballs, bird's nest fungi, and artillery fungi.

While most saprobes do not cause damage, the tiny artillery fungi, which often goes unnoticed in mulch, eject masses of sticky spores up to 20 feet away. The tar-like specks cling to house siding, cars and other nearby structures and can be extremely difficult to remove, because they often leave a stain.

Slime molds may initially appear bright yellow but darken with maturity. They are harmless and, like fungal saprobes, emerge temporarily during wet weather. Dry weather will halt their growth and dry them out. You can remove them with a rake, but they may reappear when rains return. Managing moisture or improving drainage may help limit or discourage their emergence if their presence is problematic such as on sidewalks.

Even if you don't mind their appearance, there still might be a few other reasons to remove fungal fruiting bodies. Some mushroom species are poisonous, and you may want to remove them to prevent children or pets from eating them. Wear gloves when removing poisonous mushrooms by hand. Because of the damage artillery fungi spores can do, you may want to remove the mulch that contains these fungi.



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# August To Do's

## Flowers

- To combat powdery mildew on begonia, phlox, rose, or zinnia, avoid wetting the foliage.
- Use a fungicide spray like Cleary's or Immunox.
- Keep deadheading annuals and perennials unless you aim to save the seeds.
- Most annuals will continue blooming until frost if dead-headed, watered, and fertilized.
- Many perennials will re-flower when deadheaded.
- Divide perennial phlox, daylily, iris, and spring-flowering bulbs like tulip and daffodil in August.

## Trees And Shrubs

- Water trees and shrubs once a week, especially spring-flowering ones as they set next year's flower buds in late summer and fall.
- Avoid pruning trees and shrubs now to prevent new tender growth that could be damaged in winter.
- Apply a fresh layer of mulch for soil temperature buffering and moisture retention.

## Lawns

- Dead-looking spots in your yard may just be dormant and could green up with wetter, cooler conditions.
- Sharpen your lawn mower blade.
- Mid-August is the time to control grub larvae. Mow and rake before applying Dylox or Bayer Advanced 24-hour grub control.
- Avoid fertilizing turf until October, November, or December to prevent stressing the turf.
- Get a soil test for your lawn now to plan the recommended fertilizer application later this fall.

## Fruit

- Maintain mulch around bush and vine fruits to control weeds and retain moisture.
- Prune out old canes from June-bearing raspberries to reduce disease spread.
- After the raspberry and blackberry harvest, spray plants with Sevin to combat Japanese beetles and cane borers.
- Thin out strawberry plants now, leaving 5-7 plants per row for a good harvest next year.
- Identify apple and pear trees affected by fire blight for future pruning to minimize disease spread.
- Continue sprays for apple scab in late maturing apples, and remove fallen leaves to prevent disease spread.
- Clean up fallen fruit under fruit trees to prevent disease outbreaks.

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## Cucumber, Corn, and Bean Salsa

**2-3** large cucumbers  
**2** tomatoes  
**1** yellow bell pepper  
**1** small red onion  
**¼ cup** chopped fresh cilantro  
**½ cup** black beans

**½ cup** fresh whole kernel corn,  
cooked  
**1 ounce** package dry ranch  
dressing mix  
**⅛ cup** cider vinegar  
**2 tablespoons** sugar, optional

**Wash** all vegetables. Finely **chop** cucumbers, tomatoes, pepper, and onion. **Combine** in a large mixing bowl with chopped cilantro.

**Drain** and rinse beans and add to chopped vegetables. **Add** corn. If using canned corn instead of fresh, **drain** off liquid prior to adding to vegetables.

**In a small bowl**, mix together ranch

dressing packet, vinegar, and sugar. **Pour** dressing over vegetables and mix well. **Serve** immediately or refrigerate until chilled.

**Yield:** Makes 20, ½ cup servings.

**Nutrition Analysis:** 50 calories, 0 g fat, 130 mg sodium, 7 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 70% Daily Value of vitamin C and 6% Daily Value of vitamin A

Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.

