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Gardening seems easy enough: dig a hole, position the plant, fill with dirt, water it and watch it grow.

But then something, or many things, go wrong. Bugs are chewing leaves. Your tomatoes look rotten. Your squash wilted overnight.

While some people may want to reach for their nearest insecticide and spray with abandon, we've got a different solution.

First, take a deep breath and congratulate yourself for entering the world of gardening in all of its mistake-ridden and money-sucking glory. Second, take advice from these experienced gardeners: garden coach Daryl Pulis, aka Mrs. Greenthumb; Stephanie Van Parys, head of the Oakhurst Community Garden, and Daron "Farmer D" Joffe, who share this advice about common vegetable garden problems and organic solutions.

1. Problem: Black-ish rings at base of tomato.

Diagnosis: Blossom End Rot, a lack of calcium in the blossom end of fruit typically caused by irregular watering. This is not a disease and won't spread to other fruit.

What to do: Tomatoes in the ground need about an inch of water a week and soil shouldn't be allowed to dry out, Van Parys said. Treat the potential calcium issue by sprinkling lime on the soil. Joffe uses liquid calcium to address blossom end rot. Lastly, gardeners should stick to a regular watering schedule to ensure calcium is evenly distributed through the plant.

2. Problem: Squash plant went kaput.

Diagnosis: Squash vine borer, a moth's worm that burrows its way into the stem of the squash and leaves it hollow.

What to do: This is one of the trickiest of garden problems. By the time you know you have it, it's often too late. Van Parys admits the borer is hard to prevent, so she turns to more pest-resistant squash varieties, such as "sunburst" pattypan squash. Also, try planting your squash as early as the weather allows. Joffe plants radishes and nasturtiums near squash to deter pests, but said gardeners can also wrap the stems of the squash plants with foil for protection. Ambitious gardeners who notice the trademark wilting or hole at base of squash might turn to *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or Bt, a naturally occurring pesticide, he said. Just make a tiny slit in the infected stem with a razor blade and then inject it with a syringe filled with the solution.

3. Problem: Plants don't appear to be growing.

Diagnosis: Improper soil preparation.

What to do: Carefully dig up your plants and get to work on your soil, Van Parys said. Plants need tilled soil to spread their roots, so break up the soil and any red clay underneath (at about a foot depth) and add compost to the mixture.

4. Problem: Tomato plant is losing its blossoms.

Diagnosis: Blossom drop, caused by fluctuations in temperature.

What to do: In the morning, tap your tomato bushes with chopsticks or pencils, Pulis said. The tapping vibrates the blossoms and causes the pollen to settle where it needs to be to make fruit.

5. Problem: Bugs appear to be chewing leaves.

Diagnosis: Yes, you have bugs, but that isn't always a bad thing.

What to do: Identify the critter before taking action, Pulis says. "You don't know that the insect you see is the insect doing the damage. It may be that you're spraying the good guy who is in there taking care of the problem for you," she warns. Bugs to look out for include spider mites and aphids. Joffe uses Bt for chewing insects such as caterpillars, which can leave large holes. But for flying insects, such as flea beetles which leave small holes, neem oil and insecticidal soap do the trick. Joffe notes bugs are good for increasing a plant's immune system, and a healthy plant can outgrow a minor plant infestation.

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