

Disposing of blighted foliage

factsheet for allotment holders



What is blight?

Blight is a disease that affects plants in the solanacea family, including potatoes and tomatoes. It is characterised by a powdery mould appearing on the leaves which then yellow and blacken before withering.

Blight is a fungal disease and is spread by spores from the mould. These can be windblown or from direct contact (e.g. handling a blighted plant and then a healthy one without washing hands or equipment). Unfortunately blight is highly contagious. Poor hygiene, e.g. leaving foliage (haulms) or unwanted potatoes on your plot or in the lanes on site will provide fresh sources of infection, which can also spread to other plots.



Blight spores on a leaf
© Cornell University



Blight spores on a stem
© Cornell University



Tomato blight
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Disposing of blighted plants

Composting

Blighted potato and tomato plants can be disposed of by taking them home and adding them to your domestic brown bin. Alternatively, you can take the plants to the Household Waste Recycling Centre and add them to the compost skip there.

The commercial process used to compost the plants will kill the blight spores - we do not recommend composting them yourself as the home composting process does not generate enough heat to kill the spores and could, in fact, provide the perfect overwintering conditions for them.



Home compost bins (left) don't get hot enough to kill blight spores, unlike commercial systems (right)



Burning

Blight hits during late summer when the warm, damp conditions are perfect for the disease. As this is too early for the burning period, which does not start until October, you cannot have a bonfire on your plot to dispose of the plants, so please dispose of blighted foliage using the method outlined above.