

Prevention of sunscald in pepper

Recognize the problem

Sunscald is not a disease. It is physical damage on peppers that occurs in the high heat of summer when humidity is also at a peak. Sunscald can cause the fruit to get woody and tough. White or yellow blisters develop on the side of the fruit that faces the sun. With continued exposure to sun, the damaged areas may become papery, flattened, and greyish white. The, black or grey fungi may grow in the patches and cause the fruit to rot.

Sunscald on pepper fruit. (Photo by AFRA Canada)



Background

Plants need sun to produce plant sugars and starch. They also need the warmth of the sun. However, plants can also get too much sun. This can cause sunscald damage on pepper. It is common when the plants are forming fruits in the late summer heat. Sunscald is most prevalent on the green pepper fruits. Tomatoes are also commonly scalded, and many tree fruits are at risk. Usually the foliage will help shield the fruits from the most intense rays of the sun. However, leaves may have defoliated due to insects or diseases, or plants become too tall. The developing fruits then become vulnerable to the sun.

Management

- Avoid defoliation through fungal diseases, soil nematodes, short periods of drought, or wrong fertilisation. The less shade there is, the higher the risk for sun damage and sunscald.
- Fertilize with an organic fertilizer like cattle manure or goat manure (2 canned tins at each station) prior to fruit set and after fruit set for better leaf growth to shade the peppers.
- Do not water / irrigate at full sunlight, and rather in the evening than in the morning.
- Construct row covering frames covered with shade cloth to deflect much of the intense sunlight and to protect the plants from sunscald.
- The sun scalded fruits should be isolated from the good ones to avoid secondary infections that can spread to all fruits.
- The sun scalded fruits can be home-consumed; the non-damaged fruits can be sold.

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Zambia



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