When it comes to tomatoes and home gardeners, people are passionate about their tomatoes. Probably because there is nothing that tastes like a fresh, ripe tomato right out of your garden. Unfortunately for us it seems that the last few years we have been hit with Late Blight just in time for it to ruin our harvest.

Late blight of potato and tomato is caused by the water mold Phytophthora infestans. Late blight is a ‘community disease’ because it is very destructive (think Irish Potato Famine) and highly contagious. It spreads by wind-blown spores. This disease can spread rapidly during cool, rainy weather, killing plants within a few days. Daytime temperatures between 60 to 70 degrees F, night temperatures between 50 to 60 degrees F and relative humidity near 100 percent create ideal conditions. During dry periods it becomes inactive.

Late blight requires living plant tissue, such as potato tubers, to overwinter in the Northeast. Infected potatoes, whether seed or tubers left in the garden (that did not freeze), can be a source of the pathogen. If you grow potatoes, any volunteers that sprout up this spring should be removed and disposed of in the garbage. Never compost plant material infected with late blight.

Tomato lovers take heart. There are a number of varieties that are showing resistance to late blight as well as other diseases. Many are available through seed catalogs. When you are making out your seed orders look for tomato varieties that are late blight resistant. The following are some of the tomatoes that are available and listed as late blight resistant.

‘Defiant’ is a bushy determinate plant reaching 2 to 3 feet tall which bears 3 to 4 inch globe-shaped 6 to 8 ounce red fruit. Suitable for containers it is also resistant to early blight, fusarium and verticillium wilt. About 70 days to maturity from transplant.

‘Iron Lady’ was released in 2013. This is a standard slicer type developed by Cornell University in partnership with North Carolina State University. Determinate plants grow up to 3 feet tall and produce 5 ounce, 3 to 4 inch diameter red fruit. It also shows resistance to early blight, septoria leaf spot, fusarium and verticillium wilt. About 75 days to maturity.

Tomato ‘Jasper’ is a 2013 All American Selection (AAS) Vegetable Award Winner. A cherry type tomato bred by Johnny’s Selected Seeds the vigorous, tall, indeterminate plants produce round, crack resistant fruit on small trusses. Excellent taste, a long harvest window and outstanding performance in the AAS trials contribute to this tomato’s success.

‘Lemon Drop’ was the winner of the Seed Savers Exchange’s 2010 Tomato Tasting. Indeterminate plants produce heavy sets of half to three quarter inch translucent, yellow-green cherry tomatoes. The fruit
has a refreshing tart-sweet flavor. It continues producing even in cold, wet growing conditions. 80 to 90 days to maturity from transplant.

‘Matt’s Wild Cherry’ is an heirloom, open pollinated, early season cherry tomato. Indeterminate plants produce round, 5/8 to 3/4 inch deep red fruits. Tomatoes have a tender, smooth texture and sweet, full flavor. It does not yield as well as modern varieties. Pick frequently as the thin skin cracks easily. It also shows resistance to early blight. About 60 days to maturity.

Count on a crop of super-sweet, great tasting fruits with ‘Mountain Magic’. Indeterminate plants produce two ounce, crack resistant, red fruits that would be great in salads or right off the vine. The harvest continues over a long season on disease-resistant plants. Resistant to early blight, fusarium wilt and verticillium wilt. Maturity is 66 to 75 days.

‘Mountain Merit’ is a main season standard type tomato developed at NC State University. Determinate bushy plants reaching over two feet tall produce dark red fruit over a 4 to 5 week harvest window. Fruits are 10 to 12 ounces and 3 to 3.5 inches round. A nice all-around tomato; perfect for slicing and sandwiches. A 2014 AAS Vegetable Award Winner it also has resistance to tomato spot virus, fusarium and verticillium wilt. Maturity from transplant is about 75 days.

‘Mr. Stripey’ is an heirloom beefsteak tomato. Indeterminate plants produce mild, sweet-tasting, low-acid fruit that can weigh up to 2 pounds. The fruit is golden yellow with reddish-pink vertical stripes. Do not confuse it with ‘Tigerella’, a smaller bicolor tomato from England, which is sometimes also called ‘Mr. Stripey’. About 80 days to maturity.

‘Plum Regal’ is a fresh-market plum (Roma type) tomato with crimson fruit color. ‘Plum Regal’ has a vigorous, determinate plant habit. It produces high yields of blocky, 4 ounce fruits that have a deep red color with good flavor. ‘Plum Regal’ has resistance to verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt and tomato spotted wilt virus with moderate resistance to early blight and tolerance to bacterial spot.

‘Legend’ was bred and released by Oregon State University. It is an early maturing slicing tomato. The big 4 to 5 inch fruit are glossy red, with a uniform round shape. The sweet tomatoes have just the right level of acid. Plants are determinate and mature in 68 days.

Keep in mind that being resistant does not mean that a plant is immune. Your plants may still get late blight but they should not succumb to it as quickly as a plant without any resistance. Chances are you will still be able to harvest tomatoes from your garden.

Sources for this article include: Cornell University, All-America Selections, Seed Savers Exchange, Hort Science, Johnny’s Selected Seeds, Totally Tomatoes, Park Seed, High Mowing Organic Seeds, Territorial Seed Company and Gurney’s Seed and Nursery Company.