

# Black Pellets on Tomatoes

By Deborah Birge, Fort Bend Master Gardener

**Q:** Our tomato plants are growing healthy; however, this weekend we found hundreds of little black pellets with a white filament attached all over the plants (tomato, pepper, lettuce, even rosemary). They seem to be eggs of some kind of insect, but we are not sure. We manually removed as much as we could, but this morning we found more. Could you please tell us what to do?

**Recommended solution:** What you are seeing are Artillery fungi, *Sphaerobolus stellatus*, which can be found on cars, house siding, plants, and other surfaces. Artillery fungus is also called sphere thrower since it forcibly ejects the peridiole or fungal spore for considerable distances. Spores can be projected vertically for more than 6 ft and horizontally for over 20 ft. Some



researchers have also reported that the discharge is accompanied by an audible sound!

Prevention and avoidance are the major strategies for control of these fungi since chemicals are ineffective. This involves removing or disturbing the wood chips or bark mulch with a rake to disperse the fungus and to dislodge the fruiting bodies. This also helps to dry out the mulch by increasing air circulation and creating conditions which are less favorable for the growth of the fungus. Some success has been achieved by periodic overlaying with fresh

mulch, thereby reducing the light but, it is important to avoid making the mulch layer too thick. It is also important to select mulches that contain at least 85% bark. Avoid mulches that contain a high proportion of wood since wood chips are better sources of carbon, an important food source for the fungus, than mulches that mainly contain bark. All types of wood mulches can potentially support the growth of fungus and research is currently in progress to determine if one type of mulch is more frequently associated with certain fungus than another. Another tactic to minimize fungi in the landscape is to use an alternative form of mulch such as black plastic, stone, pea gravel, or marble chips in areas directly adjacent to homes, cars, or other surfaces where the risk of damage is the greatest.

**Resources:** The above information is from this site: <https://portal.ct.gov/CAES/Fact-Sheets/Plant-Pathology/Sphaerobolus-stellatus-The-Artillery-Fungus>

**Photo Credit:** Andrea Tamayo