

# Production Blog

## Start Spotting Tar Spot in Cornfields

7/1/2025 | 1:34 PM CDT



By Pamela Smith, Crops Technology Editor

Connect with Pamela:

@PamSmithDTN



Look for the spot that won't rub off the corn leaf to determine if corn is infected with tar spot. (Photo by Matthew Vandehaar)

Remember when your mom licked her thumb or finger to swipe at something stuck to your face? And, when she couldn't dislodge it, she'd dig a little deeper -- only to discover it was a freckle (or alas, permanent magic marker?)

It's time to take Mom's technique (or something akin to it) to the cornfield to scout for the disease called tar spot.

As with most corn diseases, early detection is crucial for best management practices. But tar spot can be tricky to decipher from other diseases, insect frass or simply dirt. That's where the "mommy spit" scouting technique comes in.

Kansas State University Row Crop Pathologist Rodrigo Onofre uses a version of it to sort the differences.

"For me, what really helps is you know if you get a wet cloth and try to clean that leaf," he said in a news release. ([https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/...](https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/))

"If it's tar spot, it's not going to rub off, but everything else will clean off."

## More Recommended for You

Top 10 Ag Stories of 2025: No. 2

**Growers Expected to Set New Record Average Yields Despite Seasonal Setbacks**



12/30/2025 | 4:58 AM CST

No. 2 on DTN's list of the Top 10 Ag Stories of the Year focuses on how, in 2025, both corn and...

Top 5 Things to Watch

**USDA Outlook, Farm Bill Drafts**



2/15/2026 | 4:59 AM CST

A short market week and the USDA Ag Outlook forum are some of the major events we'll be...

Tar spot showed up in early June in several Midwestern states and has been adding some territory since. There's a map that tracks where it is being found. Find it here: [https://corn.ipmpipe.org/...](https://corn.ipmpipe.org/)

So far, counties in Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri have reported positive tar spot detections.

As DTN reported in an earlier article ([https://www.dtnpf.com/...](https://www.dtnpf.com/)), the key environmental factors favoring tar spot are moderate temperatures, high humidity and prolonged leaf wetness, particularly in areas with a history of the disease and a presence of corn residue. Tar spot appears as small, raised black spots scattered across the upper and lower leaf surfaces.

Looking back during the past few years of detections and reports, tar spot in June does not necessarily lead to widespread epidemics in July and August. Keep in mind that some corn hybrids are more susceptible than others, too.

The question of when to spray fungicides is covered at length in a report from the Crop Protection Network (CPN).([https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/...](https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/)) As that report indicates, research from across the Midwest and Canada has consistently shown that fungicide applications at VT to R3 have been the best timing to manage the disease.

Iowa State University plant pathologist Alison Robertson covered tar spot in a blog titled "Tar Spot in Central Iowa Should Not Be a Surprise," that she posted recently: see [https://crops.extension.iastate.edu/...](https://crops.extension.iastate.edu/)

Darcy Telenko's lab at Purdue University tracks tar spot here: [https://indianafieldcroppathology.com/...](https://indianafieldcroppathology.com/)

The University of Missouri recently covered tar spot in this article along with photos to help identify it: [https://extension.missouri.edu/...](https://extension.missouri.edu/)

Crop Lookout is a real-time interactive map that highlights emerging field crop issues (including tar spot) across the U.S. and Canada from the CPN. Updated throughout the growing season by university extension specialists and research partners, the tool visualizes reports of diseases, pests, and other agronomic challenges as they develop. ([https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/...](https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/))

DTN's article discussing a new crop risk calculator from CPN can be found here: [https://www.dtnpf.com/...](https://www.dtnpf.com/)

Pamela Smith can be reached at [pamela.smith@dtn.com](mailto:pamela.smith@dtn.com)

Follow her on social platform X @PamSmithDTN

(c) Copyright 2025 DTN, LLC. All rights reserved.

< [Previous Post \(Western Weed Finds Its Way to Missouri Cropland\)](#)

[Next Post \(Keep Corn Mutant and Soybean Miracles Coming\)](#) >



Comments

DIM[1x3] LBL[] TMPL[feature] T[]

Related Content



Corn Black Layer Sends a Signal About Building Dry Matter Production Blog



9/10/2025 | 6:56 AM CDT Here's why black layer means game over on building dry matter in a corn crop.

Combines Kick Up Clouds of Black Dust Production Blog



10/9/2025 | 10:43 AM CDT That cloud of black behind the combine might be more than dust. It's nature's way of degrading plant tissue.

Seed Company's Data Reveal Lower 2025 Yields in Major Corn States Production Blog



11/4/2025 | 12:27 PM CST In September, USDA estimated a corn crop averaging 186.7 bpa. However, one seed company's harvest data is...

Sponsored Content Let your corn shine bright with Opello



From: Syngenta Get the application flexibility you want + the corn rootworm control you need with Opello insecticide.

All Blogs



Recommended for You



DTN Daily Basis Comments Corn, Soybean Basis Steady Photo of the Week Photo of the Week

Projected Revenue Insurance Prices Daily Average of December Corn, November Soybeans, September HRS Wheat Cargill Ends Milwaukee Operations Soon Cargill Closes Milwaukee Ground Beef Plant

House Takes Another Stab at Farm Bill New Farm Bill Expands Disaster Programs, Increases Guaranteed Operating Loan Limits, Tweaks Dairy Policy



Pamela Smith



About the Author Connect with Pamela: @PamSmithDTN