

PLANT DISEASE CONTROL NOTES

EXTENSION DIVISION • VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

ORNAMENTAL AND FLOWER DISEASES

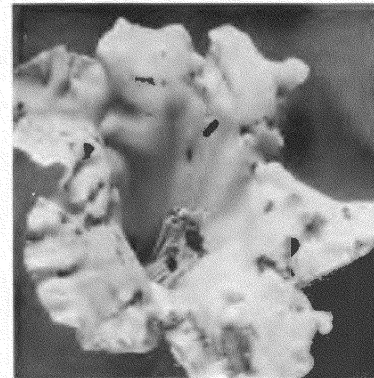
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OVULINIA PETAL BLIGHT OF AZALEA
R. C. Lambe
Extension Specialist, Plant Pathology

Control Series 116

The causal fungus, *Ovulinia azaleae*, attacks chiefly the Indian and Kurume types, but all others are susceptible and infected occasionally. Under favorable conditions the disease may spread so rapidly as to destroy, in a few days, practically all the flowers of an extensive planting.

SYMPTOMS: Spots on the petals are first apparent when about the size of a pinhead. They are pale or whitish on colored flowers, and rust-colored on white flowers. The spots are at first circular, but enlarge readily into irregular blotches with the affected tissue becoming soft and disorganized. Eventually the entire corolla collapses. Affected petals are somewhat slimy and fall apart if rubbed gently between the fingers. In this manner, the diseased flowers can be distinguished from those injured by weather, insects or by other causes. Diseased flowers dry and cling to the plants for some time, presenting an unsightly appearance; whereas normal flowers of Indian azaleas fall from the plants while still displaying color and normal shape.



Petal blight

DISEASE CYCLE: In the blighted flowers, the fungus produces hard, black objects, known as sclerotia, which overwinter in the soil. Fruiting bodies develop from them in the spring, bearing spores that may infect relatively few flowers. Secondary spores are produced in large numbers on the initial infections. The secondary spores are responsible for widespread, destructive outbreaks of flower spot.

Azalea petal blight occurs primarily on azaleas grown out-of-doors in the warm climate of the southern states, but it has been introduced into the North in shipments of plants from the South. It is conceivable that survival of sclerotia might be limited by unfavorable conditions out-of-doors in the North. Under greenhouse environment an abundance of the inoculum (the causal organism) is produced. Ample inoculum is provided by sclerotia in old flower tissue and by free sclerotia that drop to the ground and remain undetected. Unsold plants, forced 1 year and held over for forcing again the following year, also are sources of inoculum.

CONTROL: Picking and destroying affected flowers, and replacing the surface litter about infected plants with uncontaminated material, are means of reducing the sources of primary infection.

KEYS TO PROPER USE OF PESTICIDES

- 1. Read the label on each pesticide container before each use. Follow instructions to the letter; heed all cautions and warnings, and note precautions about residues.**
- 2. Keep pesticides in the containers in which you bought them. Put them where children or animals cannot get to them, preferably under lock and away from food, feed, seed, or other material that may become harmful if contaminated.**
- 3. Dispose of empty containers in the manner specified on the label.**

SEE YOUR DOCTOR IF SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS OCCUR DURING OR AFTER USE OF PESTICIDES.

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