

Gray Mold or *Botrytis*

Botrytis blight or gray mold is a fungal disease, affecting a wide range of herbaceous plants. There are several species of the fungus, but the most common one is *Botrytis cinerea*. *Botrytis* infections are favored by cool (60 degrees Fahrenheit or 15 degrees Celsius), rainy spring and summer weather. Gray mold can be most damaging when rainy, misty weather continues over several days.

The most obvious symptom of *Botrytis* is the fuzzy gray or brown growth that covers fruit, leaves, and stems. It is most likely to infest developing and harvested fruit, and dead or dying tissues of plants. It can later spread into living tissues. It is sometimes a problem on ornamentals – particularly African Violets and other succulents.

The pathogen spends most of its time on leaves, overwintering on dead and living leaves primarily as resting mycelium (masses of threadlike hyphae). In the spring, the fungus produces thousands of spores on each aging or dead leaf. The spores are spread by wind, rain, or any action which moves the plants. After about 14 hours, the spores will have infected previously healthy tissue. Petals and other parts of older flowers are prime infection sites. Lush foliage and excessive tissue growth are also ideal for the development of *Botrytis*, since the interior of the plant canopy will hold dampness longer. These infections may destroy developing fruit immediately, or become dormant until the fruit begins to ripen. Secondary infections may occur when spores that cling to the ripening fruit germinate in moist packaging conditions after the fruit is harvested.

There are several things you can do to control *Botrytis* fungus:

- **Sanitation is an important step.** Remove dead or dying tissue from plants and from the soil surface. If you are maintaining plants in a greenhouse, remove debris from the premises. Sanitation alone is not enough. The fungus can produce 60,000 or more spores on a piece of plant tissue the size of your little finger nail. Even one spore can infect a plant and cause disease.
- **Avoid injuring your plants.** When taking cuttings, do not leave large stubs of tissue on stock plants. Avoid overhead watering or misting plants, especially if this blight has been troublesome in the past. To promote rapid drying of plants space them to allow for good air circulation.
- **Fungicides are effective against *Botrytis* but only as protectants.** Apply these when spring weather is continuously cool and wet, or if the disease has been a problem in the previous year. Fungicides that are effective include basic copper sulfate, benomyl, and captan. Brand names of these fungicides may be different from the common names. Be sure to read the label of any product, and do not apply any of these to plants not listed on the label.

For more information, contact your local WSU Cooperative Extension office.

References

[Plant Diseases. Gray Mold \(Botrytis Blight\)](#). Extension Bulletin 1045, Washington State University Cooperative Extension

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