



Rose Disease Management

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Roses are a popular flowering plant used in our landscapes, but these beautiful plants can quickly start to struggle without proper watering, fertilizing, and disease control. I've noticed several roses (including some of my own) suffering from some common disease problems, so what better time write an article related to dealing with rose diseases?

Black spot is a common fungal disease and can be one of the most serious. Circular black spots began to appear on the upper leaf surface and as these spots enlarge, the leaves begin to turn yellow, and eventually fall off, defoliating the plant partially or almost totally. If the disease is not controlled, defoliation continues, weakening the plant and preventing flowering. The fungus moves from leaf to leaf in wet weather or heavy watering and new spots appear every 5 to 10 days. Black spot cannot be properly controlled without an adequate spray program. This means spraying before the problem becomes severe, spraying both sides of leaves starting after spring growth and continuing at 7-10 day intervals or after heavy rains. If leaves are infected, remove the leaves and any infected leaf litter prior to new spring growth.

Powdery mildew is another common fungal disease on roses and other plants that can cause serious issues if not dealt with. The characteristic white mold can appear on young leaves, shoots, and buds. Powdery mildew can also cause infected leaves to become distorted or fall off. Flower buds can also fail to open or poor quality flowers may develop. Powdery mildew can occur almost any time of the growing season if temperatures are warm with high humidity at night and low during the day. It is most severe in shady areas.

Roses also develop stem cankers and suffer from "dieback." Cankers appear as dead or discolored areas on rose canes and vary from light tan to dark purplish brown. There are various species of fungi that cause these cankers when they enter healthy canes through wounds caused by winter injury, improper pruning, wind, hail, or flower cutting. Cankers can enlarge until they entirely surround the cane or can reach the base of the plant spreading to other canes killing the plant. These problems usually occur on plants that have been weakened by black spot, poor nutrition, or winter injury.

Rose rust is another fungus-caused disease which causes orange-colored spots to appear on stems and leaves. When rust is severe, an orange dust-like substance (fungal fruiting structures and spores) may be present on the plant surface and on the ground below the plant. Rose rust attacks all plant parts except the roots and petals. Severely diseased leaves of highly susceptible cultivars may turn yellow or brown and drop.

Botrytis blight is a gray mold fungus and often infects rose flowers and buds. Infected canes have discolored sunken areas and dieback that can extend down the stem from the flowers. Diseased flower petals have small, light-colored spots surrounded by reddish halos which can quickly expand into large irregular blotches. Buds will also fail to open and often droop.

Rose rosette disease is an untreatable rose disease caused by the Rose rosette virus, and is spread and introduced into the rose during feeding by the rose leaf curl mite. The mite itself causes little damage while feeding but if it is a carrier of the virus, symptoms begin to show within one to three months. Infected roses exhibit reddened terminal growth on infected branches, and the stems become thicker than those unaffected. These stems also exhibit an abnormally high number of pliable thorns which may be either red or green. Leaves may also be deformed similarly to herbicide damage. Infected stems or roses should be removed immediately and burned or bagged as well as all roots.

Plants infected with RRV cannot be saved, however the other diseases and problems mentioned can be treated and prevented. Keeping the planting bed cleaned up is a good way to prevent buildup of fungal disease from infected leaves and debris. Keeping airflow between plants by pruning and keeping leaves dry when watering will help limit an inviting environment for fungal infection. Whenever leaves or stems appear infected, or when blooms have died out, quick removal helps prevent spread or new infections. New plantings should consist of disease-resistant varieties. Uses of fungicides can help control several fungal diseases. Common fungicides that are used for these diseases include captan, mancozeb, maneb, chlorothalonil, propiconazole, neem oil, and copper products. For more information, contact the Extension office.