

Control Powdery Mildew on Ornamentals

Growing Tips



What Is It?

Powdery mildew can diminish the beauty of landscape ornamentals; however it can be controlled through cultural practices or chemical alternatives. Powdery mildew is the name of the grayish white powdery coating of fungus mycelium and masses of spores growing on plant leaves, shoots and flowers. Lilac, zinnia and many other flowers and shrubs can be damaged. Although the plants rarely die, the disease distracts from the natural beauty of the plants. Damage ranges from a white powdery residue to malformed leaves, flower destruction and stunted plant growth.

Key Signs & Symptoms

- White to grayish-white or buff-colored patches or coating on leaves, shoots and buds
- Mildew patches or coatings that consist of a cottony, thread-like mat of fungus and spores, usually on upper leaf surfaces
- Later in the season, the mildew coating is dotted with small dark brown or black tiny specks
- Infected leaves may yellow, curl and drop prematurely
- Tender, young foliage and shoots are most susceptible

Conditions Favoring Infection

Growing conditions such as excessive nitrogen fertilization, over watering and humid, overcast weather when days are warm and nights are cool favor powdery mildew development. The disease is common in crowded plantings and in damp shaded areas with restricted air movement. It is most severe in late spring and early fall but will occur anytime during the growing season.

Control It

The high nutrient and energy demands that powdery mildew have for their growth and reproduction are met at the expense of the host plant. Control is not difficult and is needed if susceptible plants are in the landscape.

Powdery mildew is most severe on roses, phlox, zinnias and lilacs, therefore locate these plantings in open, sunlit, well drained sites. Also pruning to improve air circulation and sun penetration help to reduce powdery mildew. The mildew is superficial and can be removed by gently spraying plants daily with a stream of water which may reduce some of the mildew. At the end of the growing season, destroy or discard mildew infected annuals and leaves of shrubs to reduce carryover of the mildew fungi into the next season.

Due to their nature, the mildew is easily controlled by properly timed and applied fungicide applications. These prevent new infections and eradicate any established ones on mildew sensitive plants.



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