



Myrtle Rust - Fact Sheet

Updated March 2016

Myrtle Rust:

This plant disease first became an issue in Australia around 2010 having arrived from South Africa. As the name implies it is a rust disease, which is a fungal disease, that affects myrtles. This is a real worry for Australia as the Myrtle family (Myrtaceae) is perhaps the most important of all plant families. It contains the gums, bottlebrush, lily pillie, trees, paperbarks and Geraldton Wax to name just a few species. It was originally thought that it might cause major damage not just to our gardens but also to our bushland areas. However it does seem that quite a few plants do have resistance due to natural variability in bushland and while there is some damage it is not as bad as first feared. However a number of ornamental garden plants have been severely affected including :

- Agonis sp.—Willow leaf myrtles
- Geraldton Wax
- Lemon Myrtles
- Gossia sp
- Austromyrtus sp
- Lilly pillies
- Callistemon sp

What does it look like?

This particular rust disease looks a bit like any other rust that you may have seen on other garden plants. This particular rust is closely related to the fungi causing guava rust, which is also known as eucalyptus rust, and part of a complex of rusts that infect the Myrtaceae family of plants. This is a very severe disease in many overseas countries. Myrtle rust produces lesions on young, actively growing leaves and shoots, as well as on fruits and sepals.



Image from DPI NSW



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Leaves may become buckled or twisted as a result of infection. On turpentine and callistemon rust lesions are purple in colour, with masses of bright yellow or orange-yellow spores. Occasionally, they may have dark brown spores. Severe rust disease in young trees may kill shoot tips, causing loss of leaders and a bushy habit. Look for damaged new growth like that shown in the picture below.



Image Australian National Botanical Garden, Canberra

What can you do about it?

Severely affected plants can be pruned and the waste material disposed of in garbage bins. I would not recommend composting affected tissue. Plants severely and repeatedly damaged might be best to be removed and replaced with different species. After pruning treat with a registered fungicide. These include

- Eco Fungicide
- Copper based sprays
- Mancozeb
- Triforine

I have found that even reasonably susceptible plants will respond well to pruning, fertilising and extra water in the growing season.



Image WA DPI