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Powdery Mildew - Fact Sheet

Adapted from http://www.sgaonline.org.au/info_powderymildew.html

When you have humid, overcast weather combined with warmer days you will almost certainly have the ideal conditions for the onset of the fungal disease Powdery Mildew (*Oidium* sp.), seen here on a pumpkin leaf.



Powdery Mildew is a widespread fungal disease that will attack a variety of plants. It's actually a group of related fungi. Some attack a range of different plants, while others are more specific in what they attack. Almost all start as faint white spots on leaves.

Mature leaves will develop the white spots, while young leaves may be distorted (such as curling at the edges or puckering).

It spreads by releasing spores, which are carried on air currents. The spores require high humidity for germination but they won't germinate in wet weather. Most Powdery Mildews are active between the temperature range 11 – 28 degrees C.

Prevention

As with all disease, prevention is better than cure. There are many cultural practices that will help prevent the disease:

- Don't allow plants to become overcrowded and shaded, so plant in an open, sunny position, with plenty of space between plants to allow good air circulation.
- Avoid over-feeding with high nitrogen fertilisers as this causes the plant to grow lush, weak growth that is easily attacked by disease.
- Avoid overhead watering in damp weather or at night as this will increase the humidity.

If an outbreak does occur, remove all infected plant parts and dispose of safely in the wheelie bin or in a hot compost heap, do not compost in a tumbler type compost bin as they tend not to achieve the 65C that is need to kill spores.

Treatments

There are a range of commercial fungicides on the market that are registered for control of this disease. Check with you local nursery for products that contain Diathane as the active constituent or Eco Fungicide.

However as many plants that are susceptible to this disease are fruit and vegetables many people are after more environmentally friendly remedies. Experiments have shown that full-cream milk is successful against Powdery Mildew on zucchinis and grapevines. In fact, rose-growers Ross Roses in South Australia use full-cream milk successfully as a spray, up to once a week in a bad season.

I have trialled a preparation of 100ml of full cream milk mixed with 1 litre water and have found good control on mildew on Hydrangeas and on African violets.

Milk isn't a preventative. It causes the fine hairs on the fungal spores to shrivel within hours of application. If you do decide to use milk avoid using in temperatures above 25 degrees C as it can cause burning on foliage as the milk disrupts the leaves waxy protective layer on some plants.



Powdery mildew on tomatoes

