

Plant Disease Notes

Gray Mold of Strawberries

Gray mold, caused by the fungus *Botrytis cinerea*, is a common and serious problem wherever strawberries are grown. The fungus is widespread and is often found in new plantings.

Symptoms. The disease is named for the grayish brown spores that cover the surface of lesions on the fruit. Infections first occur on fruit tissue under the calyx. Fruit infections appear as soft, light brown, rapidly expanding spots. Lesions increase rapidly in size under favorable conditions (cool temperatures, wet conditions, and high relative humidity). Both green and red fruit are susceptible to infection, but ripening fruit rots faster. Infected strawberries maintain their shape but are covered by a gray dusty mold (fungal mycelium and spores).

Persistence and Transmission. The gray mold fungus survives the winter in a dormant state (mycelium or sclerotia) in plant debris or on alternate hosts. Early season temperatures between 70 and 80 degrees F and wet weather are ideal for disease development. Infection can also occur at lower temperatures when the plants are wet for

extended periods. The fungus usually infects the plant through dead or dying plant tissue. Fruit resting on the soil, touching another decayed fruit or dead leaves in dense foliage, are most commonly attacked. Spores of the fungus can be spread by the slightest touch or by wind. Pickers handling infected fruit often spread the disease.

Control. Gray mold of strawberries can be controlled by the following strategies:

- Plant strawberries in a sunny location that provides good air movement and soil drainage.
- Use plastic mulches to prevent fruit-soil contact.
- Avoid overhead irrigation if possible.
- Maintain a preventive fungicide spray program from transplanting through harvest.
- Pick fruit frequently, and remove and destroy all diseased fruit and dead plant material.
- Handle fruit carefully to prevent bruising, and refrigerate fruit promptly at 32 to 50 degrees F.
- Remove all plant residue after harvest.



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Use chemicals only according to the directions on the label. Follow all directions, precautions, and restrictions that are listed.

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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