

## *Plant Disease Notes*

# Scurf

ANR-947

Scurf, also known as soil-stain, is caused by the fungus *Monilochaetes infuscans*. Damage from this disease is primarily superficial and detracts from the market value.

**Symptoms.** Symptoms of scurf begin during the growing season as small, dark brown to black spots that develop on the roots and later merge to form irregular lesions. These lesions enlarge until the entire surface of the root is discolored. Copper-skinned sweet potatoes usually have brown lesions, and red-skinned sweet potatoes have black lesions. These lesions are only on the skin of storage roots and do not directly affect the underlying tissue. Affected tissue can be easily scraped off. Cracks may develop on severely affected sweet potatoes and result in water loss and shrinkage. Scurf-infected sweet potatoes are more susceptible to invasion by other fungi.

Scurf lesions will continue to enlarge when sweet potatoes are put into storage, and new lesions can appear if a high relative humidity is maintained.

### **Persistence and Transmission.**

Most scurf infections are the result of using infected propagating material. The fungus can also survive in crop debris in the soil for 1 to 2 years. Disease severity is greater and persistence of the pathogen longer in fine-textured soils and in soils with high levels of organic matter. The disease has a narrow host range that consists of species in the genus *Ipomoea*.

The optimum temperature for disease development is 75°F, but scurf can develop, to a lesser extent, over a wide range of temperatures. Disease development is highest when soil moisture is optimal for plant growth.

**Control.** Scurf can be controlled by the following strategies:

- Use only scurf-free, fungicide-treated sweet potatoes as seed roots. Bed these potatoes in soil free of the disease.
- Cut transplants at least 1 inch above the soil line, and dip them in fungicide.
- Grow sweet potatoes after a 3- to 4-year rotation with other crops.



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

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**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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