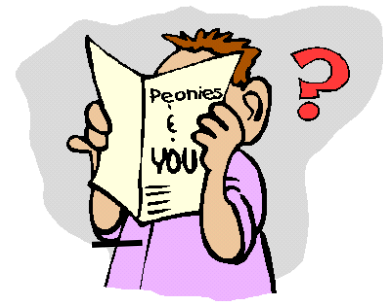


What's Wrong with My Peonies?



PROBLEM “Measles”, “Red Spot” or “Leaf Blotch”

SYMPTOMS Small, circular, red or purple spots on upper leaf surfaces just before bloom. Later, spots appear on leaf undersides. Spots enlarge and join into irregular blotches that are glossy dark purple on the upper side of the leaf, chestnut brown underneath.

CAUSE A fungus: *Graphiopsis chlorocephala*

REMEDY By the time you see the spots, it's too late to do anything about them this season. Spray with fungicide when leaf shoots are two to four inches tall and continue until flowers begin to open. In the fall, remove all old leaves to ground level and destroy. Also, consider replacing the plant with a disease-resistant variety.

PROBLEM “Botrytis Blight”

SYMPTOM Young shoots are covered with a dense, velvety gray mold. Flowers may look “blasted.”

CAUSE A fungus: *Botrytis paeoniae*

REMEDY Inspection and sanitation are keys to controlling this disease. Remove infected flowers and leaves immediately. This fungus likes the cool, wet weather of spring, so if you choose to spray, that's when you do it. Use basic copper sulfate sprays, captan, chlorothalonil, copper or mancozeb. Be sure to spray all plant parts to thoroughly wet the foliage and soil.

PROBLEM “White Mold”

SYMPTOM Stems turn light tan and may be dry and stringy. The entire plant, or a portion of it, may wilt. Fluffy white mycelia appear under humid conditions.

CAUSE A fungus: *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*.

REMEDY *Sclerotinia* is a soil-inhabiting fungus that is nearly impossible to remove.

PROBLEM “Bud-blast”

SYMPTOM Flower buds remain small and turn black but no gray mold appears on them.

CAUSE May be related to potassium deficiency, late spring frosts or other environmental issues.

REMEDY Patience. Flowers may appear next year.

PROBLEM “Nematodes”

SYMPTOM Plants fail to flower and are small and weak. Roots are short and stubby. Fine roots show galls about one-eighth inch in diameter. When sliced, these reveal almost microscopic worms.

CAUSE Nematode: *Meloidogyne spp.*

REMEDY Plant only nematode-free roots. Immerse crown and roots in hot-water (115°F) for one-half hour. This can kill nematodes.

PROBLEM “Phytophthora Blight”

SYMPTOM Leaves and stems become dark brown or black, and somewhat leathery. Entire shoots may turn black and die. Symptoms may appear similar to *Botrytis paeoniae* but without the velvety growth. Cankers may appear along the stem.

CAUSE A fungus: *Phytophthora cactorum*

REMEDY Kiss this plant good-bye. While *Botrytis* seldom invades the crown, *Phytophthora* often does, causing a wet rot to develop and destroying the entire plant. Remove infected plants **and** the soil they're planted in. Plant healthy new plants in well-drained areas.

PROBLEM “Wilt”

SYMPTOM Some shoots wilt, yet the basal parts look perfectly sound. If you prune off the wilted shoot near the base and look at the cross section, you see that the water conducting system inside the stem has turned brown.

CAUSE A fungus: *Verticillium albo-atrum*

REMEDY This plant is a goner. *Verticillium* is a destructive fungus that is nearly impossible to kill because it lives in the soil. Infected plants must be removed and destroyed. This spot in your garden is now a dead zone for plants susceptible to this fungus.

PROBLEM “Viral”

SYMPTOM Patterns of light and dark, sometimes in the shape of rings, appear on the leaves. Leaves may be stunted or curled.

CAUSE Several Viruses: Tobacco Rattle, Tomato Spotted Wilt, Alfalfa Mosaic Virus

REMEDY No known treatment. If plants flower normally, enjoy them. If symptoms are severe and growth and flowering are greatly reduced, remove and discard the plant.

PROBLEM “Environmental” or “Cultural”

SYMPTOM Otherwise healthy plants fail to bloom.

CAUSE

- Planted too deeply. Peony “eyes” should not be more than 2” below the soil surface.
- Not planted deep enough. For Tree Peonies, the graft union should be at least 4” below the soil surface to encourage the plant to develop its own roots.
- Too much shade or competition from tree roots. (Move to better location).
- Late Frosts. To avoid this, choose varieties with later flowering.
- Too much mulch. Do not use over 2” of mulch on shrub type peony.
