

Azalea Gall: *Exobasidium vaccinii*

Introduction

Azalea gall is a problem of widespread occurrence in this country. Pale green, pink, white, or brown fleshy galls, caused by the fungus *Exobasidium vaccinii*, may develop on leaves (Fig. 1), branch tips, flower parts, and even on seedpods. *Exobasidium vaccinii* also infects species of *Vaccinium* including cranberries where it produces bright red, swollen spots on the leaves and fruits. Infected stems become thickened.

Symptoms and Signs

The fungus overwinters within the infected plant. In the late spring and early summer, a whitish coating appears on the swollen plant tissue (Fig. 2). This coating is composed of many microscopic fungal structures which produce spores capable of infecting more plants during moist weather. This disease is not usually a serious problem unless wet conditions prevail for long periods of time.



Figure 1: An immature leaf gall on azalea. (provided by the Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic, Cornell University)



Figure 2: A mature azalea leaf gall that is producing a white layer of spores (provided by the Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic, Cornell University)

Disease Cycle

The disease develops on the leaves of azalea. The severity of symptoms varies depending on the weather conditions. Spores are produced on the leaves during the spring and summer. The spores are dispersed on air currents and splashed by rain drops on to healthy leaves where they can cause new infections. This normally occurs during cool, wet weather. The symptomatic galls are not visible until the following spring.

Management Strategies

To control this problem, the galls should be handpicked and destroyed before they turn white. Some fungicides are registered to help manage this problem in plantings in New York, but most are restricted-use fungicides and not curative. Removal of galls and/or applying fungicides as a preventative treatment is

recommended, and for small plantings, hand removal of galls may still be the most viable option. For commercial applications in New York, please refer to the appropriate pest management guidelines.

Most native and horticultural azalea and rhododendron plants are susceptible. Some

species and cultivars are more susceptible than others. *Rhododendron maximum* L., *R. catawbiense* Michx., and their hybrids, are listed as being particularly susceptible, as are the Indica azalea group. Susceptible plants growing in poorly aerated soils are more subject to infection by the fungus than those growing in well-aerated soils.

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READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE! Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly. All pesticides distributed, sold, and/or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office.

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