

ALTERNARIA BLIGHT OF ZINNIAS

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Alternaria blight of zinnias, caused by the fungus Alternaria zinniae, can be very destructive. Certain plantings of zinnias in the spring may be totally destroyed by this disease.

The fungus can be carried on or within the seed. It is possible for the young seedlings to be infected before they emerge from the soil.

The most common symptom is the spotting of the foliage (Figure 1). These appear first as individual circular spots but rapidly become irregular. The



Figure 1. Leaf spot phase of Alternaria blight on zinnia.

spots vary in size, are reddish-brown and may have grayish-white centers on the upper leaf surfaces. As the spots increase in size and number, the affected leaves become brown and dry.

The fungus also attacks the blossoms causing them to darken, wither and become unsightly.

Large lesions, which may girdle the stem, often form at the nodes. Dark brown to black cankers with sunken centers are common at the base of the stems of diseased plants. Affected plants often wilt completely, even when the basal cankers do not completely encircle the stems.

Control

This disease can be prevented by treating the seeds with captan before sowing. An application of captan spray or dust after the seedlings emerge or after transplanting will help control it. Do not wait for the spots to appear before trying to control this disease.