

## AZALEA PETAL BLIGHT

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Azalea petal blight or flower spot is caused by the fungus Ovulinia azaleae. While not a problem with outdoor plantings of azaleas and rhododendrons in Connecticut, it has occurred on plants forced in the greenhouse.

Petal blight first appears as pinhead spots on the blossoms. The spots are whitish on colored flowers and rust-colored on white flowers. The spots are circular at first, but enlarge into irregular blotches with the tissue becoming soft.

Affected petals are slimy and fall apart if rubbed gently between the fingers. This is one method of distinguishing it from other types of injury. Also, diseased flowers dry and cling to the plant for some time. In greenhouses, the disease may spread rapidly and destroy the whole crop within a few days, if not controlled.

This disease is difficult to control because it produces hard, black objects, known as sclerotia, which enable the fungus to survive under unfavorable conditions. These could remain undetected in the greenhouse from one year to the next.

A Connecticut grower used benomyl at the recommended rate with good results.

Termil, used as a thermal dust, gives effective control during forcing.