

Poinsettia Root Problems

Joseph J. Maisano, Jr.

Cooperative Extension Educator—Horticulture and Turf

R*hizoctonia* and *Pythium* are the two root fungus pathogens responsible for cutting and early season root rot problems in poinsettia. *Thielaviopsis* usually occurs in older plants later in the season.

The early season root rots usually appear soon after potting. The plants wilt and stems turn brown at or below the soil line, while the roots are brown or nonexistent. A poorly-drained potting medium, lack of sunlight and air movement to allow for drying of medium after planting, crushing or bruised stems at planting, and cool temperatures, are a few possible causes that encourage these fungi.

Severely affected plants are always behind all season resulting in bracts which are small and poorly developed. Usually these plants are unsalable.

Thielaviopsis basicola has similar foliar symptoms as root rot, but this disease progresses more slowly. The leaves roll inward before yellowing and dropping off. Infected stems may redden and become swollen. Black resting spores can be seen in cracks in the basal portion of the stem.

The roots are usually white at the tip and upon entering the stem. The area between the tip and the stem will be brown streaked.

All three root diseases can be controlled by applying fungicides during the growing season.

Avoid root problems on poinsettia by following sanitation practices, proper planting procedures, preventative fungicide treatments and proper cultural practices and procedures.