

# Rhododendron and Azalea Diseases

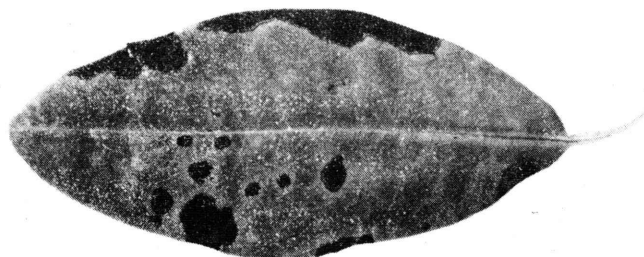
Rhododendrons and azaleas are well suited to the mild, moist climate of western Oregon. Although these plants are relatively disease-free, some problems do develop as a result of either unfavorable growing conditions or parasitic disease.

## Yellow leaves

Yellowing, dropping of leaves, and a general unthrifty appearance may be due to a disturbance of the root system. This may result from water-saturated soil, root-feeding insects, root-decay fungi, or some other factor.

## Black leaf edges

The evergreen nature of many rhododendrons and azaleas sometimes leads to freezing injury, particularly where application of fertilizer in late summer has stimulated late, tender growth. The first sign of damage is a watersoaked appearance of the leaf edges. This may be followed by a browning similar to that caused by winter drying, or the affected tissue may become blackened.



Watersoaked or black areas along the leaf tip or edge may be caused by freezing.



Puckering and distortion of new leaves indicates frost damage.

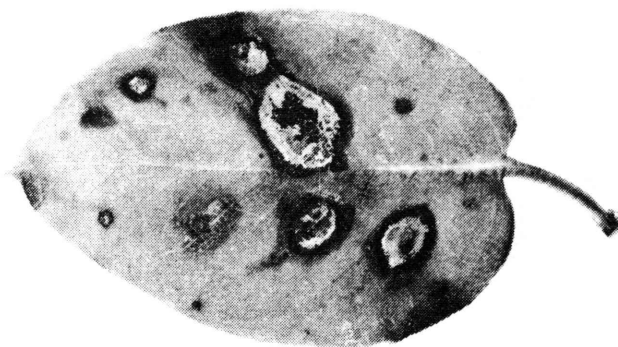
## Puckered leaves

Puckering or crinkling of leaves may be caused by exposure to some herbicide, but is more often due to frost injury of the expanding leaves after the buds start to open.

## Leaf spots

Spots caused by fungi vary widely in size, color, and general appearance, depending on the cause. Fortunately, fungus leaf spots are not common or are usually secondary, following other injury to the leaf.

Large, brown, irregular blotches characterize some leaf spots. Others appear as small, silver-gray circular spots. Some spots are target-shaped and small black fruiting bodies of the fungus may sometimes be seen, although probably only with the aid of a magnifying glass.



Fungus leaf spots sometimes appear as silver-gray spots on the upper surface of the leaf.

Control consists of the same general treatment. Remove infected leaves from the plant where this is practical. Collect and burn fallen leaves to destroy as much infectious material as possible.

If the disease is severe, a spray applied just after the flowers or new leaves appear and repeated at 2-week intervals during the growing season may reduce damage. Zineb or maneb (3 to 4 tablespoons per 3 gallons of water) are suitable spray materials. Add a spreader-sticker to the sprays.



OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY  
**EXTENSION  
SERVICE**

Extension Service, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Joseph R. Cox, director. This publication was produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties.

### Leaf gall

This disease, caused by *Exobasidium vaccinii*, is most common on azaleas, particularly in greenhouses, but also occurs on some rhododendrons. The galls are white-to-pink fleshy enlargements on leaves and flowers. The surface of the galls is covered by a white mealy coating. Picking off the galls will provide some control, but a fungicidal spray may be necessary where the disease is severe. The materials used for leaf spots will control leaf gall if applied just before the buds open and at 2-week intervals until the leaves are fully grown.

### Bud blast

Severe winter cold may cause internal bud damage on many species and varieties of rhododendrons with the resulting gradual death of the buds. Buds that are only slightly damaged may fail to open and bloom properly. Protect plants if possible during periods of severe cold.

The most common cause of bud blast on *native* rhododendrons and some azaleas is *Briosia azalea*. In early spring the buds are killed, turn gray or

brown and finally black, and are covered with small pin-like, spore-producing structures. Removal of diseased buds in early spring will help control bud blast. If the disease is severe, spray with a weak copper fungicide, such as basic copper sulfate (2 teaspoonsful/gal.) or with captan 50WP (2 tablespoons/gal.) at 7- to 10-day intervals while the buds are forming.

### General

Proper culture to provide growing conditions for thrifty, vigorous plants is the best means of preventing serious disease problems. Sanitation procedures, such as the removal and destruction of diseased plants, branches, and leaves, reduce the amount of fungus material available to infect plants.

Timely spraying with a suitable fungicide will often stop the development of a disease before it can cause serious damage. Some varieties of rhododendrons and azaleas may be injured by certain fungicides. Watch plants carefully and use fungicides with caution to avoid plant damage.