

Peony Blight

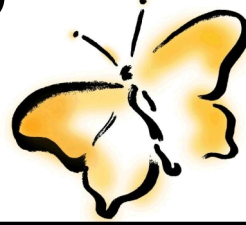
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Botrytis blight is the most important disease of peonies in Nebraska. This disease affects buds, stems, and leaves. Young shoots in all stages of growth, up to and including the buds may suddenly wilt and fall over. Examination reveal a soft, brown to black rot of the stem that may extend down to, and in some instances, below the surface of the soil. Infected small buds stop growth and turn black. Older buds turn brown and fail to open and often the petals become watery and matted. The stalk for several inches below the infected flowers is usually killed. The leaves are usually attacked later than other parts of the plants. Large, irregular spots with dark and light brown coloring appear. These spots vary considerably in size and may involve the entire leaflet.

Botrytis blight is caused by a fungus which lives from one season to the next on old diseased foliage. During spring rains the fungus becomes active and produces a tremendous amount of spores (fungus seeds). These spores are produced on the surface of the old plant material where they are easily caught up by air currents and distributed. Those which lodge on the young peony plants germinate and produce infection, if moisture is present, on the surface of the plant. More spores form in the new infection sites. So long as there is a great deal of moisture causing the foliage to remain moist most of the time, re-infection will continue.

TREATMENT: Treatment should begin with a thorough clean up of the old stems, leaves, and other plant debris in the fall. This sanitary measure will greatly reduce the amount of the disease organism in the vicinity of the plants and will make it much easier to control.

CONTROL: Spray or dust twice in the spring. Once when the new shoots are first emerging from the ground and then approximately two weeks later. Use Bordeaux mixture or liquid copper.