

## Lilac Disease and Insect Issues

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Lilacs are tough shrubs but have their share of disease and insect problems. Most will not kill lilacs, but cause leaf browning and stem dieback. If a lilac has one of the following issues, sanitation can be done from now through fall. Management with pesticides needs to be delayed until next spring.

Pseudocercospora is a fungal disease that causes severe leaf browning late July into early August. It begins as brown spots on leaves, moving from leaf edges inward. Browning may also be splotchy. The fungus can survive at least two years on plant debris, making fall cleanup of leaves important. Increasing air flow through shrubs by thinning out dead stems and one-third of the largest stems also helps.

If the disease was severe, a fungicide can be applied next spring as leaves are emerging. Use fungicides labeled for use on ornamental shrubs, such as propiconazole or myclobutanil, and follow label directions. If next spring is rainy, make repeat treatments until the rainy season ends.

Bacterial Blight begins as brown spots on leaves and stems in early spring. The spots turn black and enlarge rapidly, especially during wet weather. Leaves may become malformed, die and drop. Young stems are girdled, resulting in death of shoots and blossoms. Spots on mature stems enlarge along the stem, killing leaves within the infected area.

Fungicides will not manage bacterial disease. To reduce this blight, space plants adequately and prune out stems to increase air circulation and speed leaf drying. Prune infected branches 10 to 12 inches below visible infection and destroy them. Pruning should be done during dry weather to reduce spreading bacteria. Plant resistant cultivars or species when available.

Powdery Mildew is a common fungal disease of lilacs. It is favored by shade and warm, humid conditions. A grayish white fungal growth develops on leaves, making them unsightly. Because the disease normally appears late in the growing season, it does little damage. Improve air circulation with pruning and plant resistant cultivars or species.

Many dead stems in lilac can be a sign of shading from overcrowded stems or a sign of lilac borers or scale insects. Maintenance of lilac shrubs should involve thinning of dead stems and older, larger stems every few years.

Borers, insects that burrow into stems, inhibit water movement from roots to leaves. Severe borer damage causes stems to die and break off. Lilac borers attack plants stressed by old age, drought or disease. After our recent years of drought, we are seeing an increase in borer damage.

Adults lay eggs near the base of lilac stems during May. The larvae, a creamy-white caterpillar about three-fourths inch long, bores into older branches. Pruning out infested stems near the ground may reduce borers. Applying insecticides to the base of stems during May will reduce borer damage.

Oystershell scale is a sapsucking insect. It attaches to stems and is protected by a flat scale covering. To the untrained eye, they are often assumed to be a part of the bark. Scales mass on lilac stems and feeding kills individual stems. Stems heavily infested with scales are best pruned and destroyed.

Insecticide control for scales needs to be done from mid-May into June when eggs are hatching. At this time, scales are in the crawler stage for a short period and easier to kill. They can be controlled with horticulture oils, insecticidal soaps, acephate or bifenthrin.