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EC63-1837 Plant Diseases : Lilac Powdery Mildew

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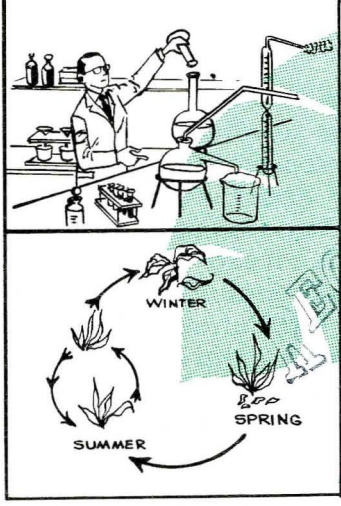

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PLANT DISEASES

EC 63-1837

JOHN L. WEIHING
Extension Plant Pathologist

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LILAC POWDERY MILDEW

Symptoms: The disease commonly appears on the leaves in late spring or summer. Both surfaces of the leaves gradually become covered with a white, cottony substance. This covering remains until the leaves are shed in the fall. All leaves may become equally infected.

Cause: Powdery mildew is caused by a fungus. The cottony appearance of the leaves results from the growth of the fungus over them. The organism sends sucker-like projections into the surface layer of the leaf from which it draws its nourishment. It produces spores (fungus seed) in tremendous number soon after the disease begins. These spores are carried about by air movement. By chance some lodge on another lilac leaf. In this way the disease builds up rapidly, particularly when cool nights follow warm days during damp, humid weather.

In the fall tiny black dots can be seen forming on the leaves. These are the fruiting bodies of the fungus which contain the winter spores. They live through the winter on old leaves. In the spring they are spread by air currents to new leaves where they cause infection. Thus the cycle continues from year to year.

The disease seems to do little or no damage to the lilacs, though they may be infected year after year. However, diseased plants lack the luster and attractiveness of healthy plants.

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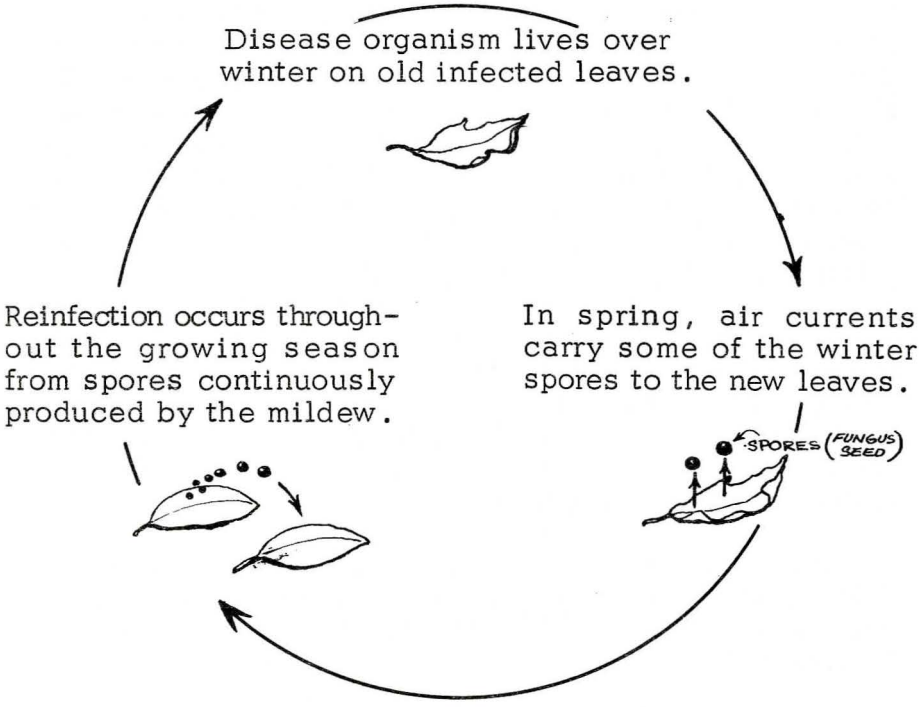
Control: Remove and burn old leaves to eliminate the overwintering spores. Spray with an appropriate fungicide when the mildew appears and reapply about every two weeks as long as necessary. Add a wetting agent to the spray solution if the fungicide does not already include one. A teaspoonful of liquid or a tablespoonful of powdered detergent per gallon is normally sufficient. It is necessary to thoroughly wet the leaves for control. Without a wetting agent, the solution will run off the waxy surfaced leaves as droplets or will adhere as droplets on the mildew, which is hard to wet.

The following compounds are suggested:

Wettable Sulfur - 2 tablespoonfuls per gallon of water
Phaltan - 2 tablespoonfuls per gallon of water
Karathane - as suggested on the package
Mildex - as suggested on the package

Life Cycle