

Ornamental Research News

Central Florida Research and Education Center

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Rhizoctonia diseases

Seasonal Watch

A.R. Chase, Plant Pathologist

It seems a little early in the year to start worrying about diseases caused by *Rhizoctonia* but we have had a very mild winter. This means that diseases that normally would not be a problem in April will appear. In Florida, *Rhizoctonia* diseases are most common during the warmer months of the year. Symptoms that you should watch for include leaf spots, tan and rather dry appearing, and up to an inch in width; and stem rots, usually found near the potting medium or soil, which result in death of that stem due to girdling. Stem rot diseases of vegetables are often called wire-stem or sore shin which describes the characteristic symptom this fungal pathogen causes. In addition to leaf spot and stem rot, *Rhizoctonia* causes root diseases on some ornamentals. The appearance of the final type of symptom, aerial blight, will probably be rare unless the plants are exposed to frequent overhead irrigation or misting. Aerial blights are really serious during the summer when rainfall is plentiful and the humidity is highest.

The best way to prevent losses from any *Rhizoctonia* disease is to use new potting medium and pots, and make sure the cuttings or seedlings you plant are healthy appearing. Fighting this disease after symptoms start is difficult even when good fungicides are labeled for the crop. Past experience in controlling these diseases indicates that if the symptoms are on stems or leaves they should be treated with a fungicide even though *Rhizoctonia* spp. are soil-borne fungi. Root diseases caused by *Rhizoctonia* spp. should be treated with a soil drench. As always, be sure what problem you have before choosing a control strategy. It is very easy to confuse *Pythium* root rot with *Rhizoctonia* root rot and many different fungi can cause leaf spots such as those described above.

The best fungicides for control of *Rhizoctonia* diseases include thiophanate methyl compounds such as Cleary's 3336, Systec 1998, Topsin M, and Domain as well as iprodione (Chipco 26019) and PCNB (Terraclor). Be sure to check fungicide labels for rates and intervals of application and make sure your crop is listed on the label.

New Dieffenbachia
Variety Released

Plant Breeding
R.J. Henny, Geneticist

In August 1993, the University of Florida (IFAS) approved release of the hybrid *Dieffenbachia* 'Sparkles'. This new cultivar has over 20 different parents in its background and is the result of several years of hybridization. It was chosen based on several important characteristics. Foliage variegation is distinctive and attractive, consisting of three colors on the upper leaf surface. The leaf midrib is white surrounded by a light green central area occupying 40-50% of the leaf surface. Within the light green areas, the leaves have dark green patches and spots, while dark green margins and faint white petioles accent the overall coloration.

In a production growth test, plants of *Dieffenbachia* 'Sparkles' were started from single, mature 72-celled liners and grown in 6-inch pots for 24 weeks. Height averaged 13 and the average leaf size was almost 8" in length by 4" in width. The average number of basal shoots was 17 per plant, which combined with a freely branching growth habit gave 'Sparkles' a compact yet full appearance. All plants in the test were graded as having excellent quality.

'Sparkles' held up well when maintained under simulated interior conditions for three months, with no decrease in the contrast of foliar variegation due to greening of the leaves under low light conditions. *Dieffenbachia* 'Sparkles' is being propagated by Florida tissue culture laboratories that assisted in its selection, initial increase and grower evaluations. Names of cooperating laboratories may be obtained from the Florida Foundation Seed Producers Inc., P.O. Box 309, Greenwood, Florida 32443, 904/594-4721, FAX 904/594-1068.

**Liz Felter, New Multi-County
Commercial Horticulturist**

Introduction
Chris Fooshee, Editor

Liz Felter is the new commercial horticulturist with the Orange County Cooperative Extension Service. She will provide educational seminars, consultations and problem diagnosis primarily for foliage, bedding plants, potted flowers and cut foliage nurseries. Felter has filled the position left vacant by Bruce Barmby's retirement. She has experience with biological pest control and looks forward to helping growers institute integrated pest management programs.

Ms. Felter is a graduate of the University of Florida with a master's degree in Agriculture and Extension

Education. She earned her bachelor's degree in Horticulture and Journalism from The Ohio State University. During her seven years as grounds supervisor at the Marriott World Center hotel, she guided the exterior and interior landscape maintenance department toward winning the FNGA State Award of Excellence, receiving Best of Category for Interior Maintenance.

Felter has worked with entomologist, Dr. Lance Osborne, in developing a successful biological pest control program for interiorscapers. She was a guest speaker on this topic at the 1992 TPIE convention and the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado convention in 1993.

Liz can be reached at the Orange County Agriculture Center, 2350 E. Michigan Street in Orlando or by calling 836-7570.

CFRECs to Merge

On Center

C.A. Conover, Center Director

About ten years ago, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences was reviewed by several agencies including the Florida Legislature, Board of Regents and USDA. Each agency recommended consolidation of the small research centers at Apopka, Leesburg and Sanford to one central Florida location.

Planning for consolidation was initiated in November of 1986 when I was appointed as the administrator for all three research centers and assigned the task of developing a consolidation plan. During the initial planning, no location for the consolidated center was proposed since a complete analysis of the needs for all clientele in central Florida had to be assessed.

When all factors were considered, it became clear that, based on industry value, acreage and the proximity of the users of information on production and utilization of ornamentals, vegetables and fruit crops (excluding citrus), a location near the CFREC-Apopka would be most desirable. Therefore, it was decided to locate the consolidated center adjacent to the present Apopka facility if land could be purchased.

The total area to be acquired is approximately 300 acres. About half has already been purchased from private owners and the remainder will be obtained from the City of Apopka. All of the property was recently fenced to prevent dumping on the presently vacant land, and clearing of the land has begun for planting to pasture until construction begins.

Next Issue - Future plans and programs.

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Ornamental Research News - Chris Fooshee, Editor
