



# Understanding Botrytis Blight

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A wise man once said: "In all thy getting, get understanding". As a rose enthusiast,

you strive to "understand" how to grow good roses. Roses that will not only add to the beauty of your garden, but also provide attractive blooms to cut for your home and to share with others. You read, research, visit other's gardens, seek advice ... all the while learning as you "grow". Once you understand what "speed bumps" to expect in your rose growing journey, and how to deal with them, it gets easier. Along the way you learn to accept imperfections ... a little blackspot, minor thrips damage, a few aphids, some yellow leaves ... They all just come with the territory. You realize that expecting "rose perfection" is not reality – and discover that the beauty of roses can be found beyond their flaws.

This article is intended to help you understand one of the "speed bumps" you may encounter over the next few months -- a fungus called Botrytis Blight. How to identify it ... and what to do about it.

Rose blooms effected with Botrytis Blight are not a pretty sight. They are certainly not the roses you envisioned growing in the garden of your dreams. Botrytis Blight, caused by the fungus *Botrytis cinera*, can occur at any time of the year, but in Central Florida it is more prevalent during periods of damp, cool weather (usually November through April). High humidity, damp/wet mornings (with lots of dew), and cool temperatures, (60 – 72 degrees), are optimum conditions for infection.

The disease affects young succulent shoots, freshly pruned canes, rose buds and petals. The fungus usually requires a wound to invade the tissue, but it may be as superficial a wound as rain spots. You may notice the first symptoms on the rose petals ... small light colored spots sometimes surrounded by a maroon halo. These are espe-



Photo Courtesy Gail Trimble

cially visible on light colored varieties. Under favorable conditions the spots quickly expand into brown, rotten blotches. Infected buds are covered with slimy grayish, yellowish to brown mold. The buds fail to open and often droop as the peduncle supporting the bud rots. Older flowers



result in a shattered mess of brown petals. Discolored, slightly sunken lesions often extend down the stem below the blighted flower buds and blooms. In addition to attacking buds and blooms, botrytis will infest leaves and petals that have dropped to the ground. As the infection progresses, wooly, gray fungal spores will develop on decaying tissue. Twigs may die back and large, diffuse, target like splotches form on canes.



The best defense against Botrytis is keeping the beds and bushes clean. Deadhead spent blooms on a regular basis and pick up fallen leaves and rose petals from the beds. This will greatly reduce the risk of Botrytis. If Botrytis is present in your garden, prune below any infected buds, blooms and stems and throw them away in a sealed bag. Botrytis spores are spread by air currents and splashing water, so removing the infected materials from your garden reduces the number of spores and reduces the chances of re-infection. Botrytis thrives in areas where rose plantings are overcrowded. Provide adequate space between bushes to allow for good air circulation. This will speed up the evaporation of moisture from the surface of the blooms and leaves and reduce the humidity levels in the beds.

Fungicides, which are recommended in this newsletter, and may already be a part of your blackspot preventative spray program, will provide some control (Cleary's 3336 mixed with Dithane M45 or Dithane T/O). Daconil 2787 (or Fungigard) is also effective, and in serious cases, Chipco is useful.

All photos courtesy of Baldo Villegas, except as noted.