

Nandina Anthracnose

Dr. Green Thumb
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Diagnosis

Nandina (*Nandina domestica*) is prized in many southern landscapes for the oriental effect that it creates as a border, specimen, or foundation plant. Sometimes referred to as “heavenly bamboo” because of its cane-like stems and delicate foliage, this shrub is common in home landscapes, parking lot islands, and mass accent plantings. The bright red berries in the fall and winter are a spectacular addition to the landscape. This plant does best in full sun or partial shade. Although this shrub has few serious insect or disease problems, it can periodically develop anthracnose under certain environmental conditions in southern climates. Anthracnose is caused by a fungus (*Colletotrichum sp.*) that may attack stems, leaves, or the fruit of this semi-evergreen shrub.

Symptoms

The leaf spot phase is the most obvious symptom of nandina anthracnose. The spots tend to be irregular in shape, ranging upwards to 3/4 inch in diameter. Spots are dark brown and are often surrounded by a bright yellow halo. This halo is a diagnostic feature of this fungus disease. Diseased leaf tissue may actually fall out of the lesions, leaving a ragged appearance to the leaves. Anthracnose may kill entire leaves, young shoots, and twigs of the shrub. Premature defoliation is often the most common result of this disease. Repeated defoliation for several successive seasons may result in loss of plant vigor and subsequent plant death. Stem dieback can also occur when the fungus invades succulent twigs. In moist environments, the fungus may continue to advance rapidly downward in lateral branches. Sunken stem lesions may result from this advancing fungal growth. The sunken lesion may be difficult to see on the stems of this shrub. Frequent rainfall and cooler temperatures during the early spring months of April and May can often lead to disease onset and development. Plants grown in shady locations tend to develop disease more readily than those grown in sunny locations. Spotted leaves remaining on the plants over the winter, and those leaves that have previously fallen to the ground, are important sources for disease outbreaks in the spring. Twig lesions on the plant may also contribute to disease activity. Wet foliage is a primary contributor to disease severity and spread to other nandina plants.

Prescription

Location is an important consideration for managing this fungus disease in new plantings. Avoid shady and protected locations where foliage may remain wet for extended periods. Select locations that get several hours of full sun. If plants are irrigated overhead, watering should be done early in the day to allow leaves to dry quickly. This will discourage disease activity. Space plants or prune established plants to allow good air circulation between and among individual shrubs. Remove and discard any fallen leaves and pruned material from the growing area. A good cleanup under existing plants is quite helpful during early spring.

In addition to good sanitation and irrigation management, several fungicides are useful in protecting new foliage from the fungus. Those materials which contain the active ingredients myclobutanil,

chlorothalonil, or propiconazole are most effective when applied prior to or at the first evidence of disease symptoms. Complete coverage and timing of an appropriate fungicide is very important to disease management. Application information is provided on individual fungicide labels.

**[See Extension Fact Sheet FSA7533](#)

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