

SOUTHERN BLIGHT ALERT
for
BEARDED IRISES
by
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Sclerotium rolfsii or Southern Blight is a dangerous fungal disease commonly encountered in Southeastern Virginia peanut production. Dr T. Michael Likins, Chesterfield County, VA Cooperative Extension Agent and former Chief Plant Pathologist for the Virginia Department of Agriculture Consumer Services has also found the disease on hostas and tomatoes. The host list continues to grow, so consult your local Cooperative Extension office for any updates.

Southern Blight, also known as Mustard Seed Rot, can be confused with Bacterial Soft Rot on bearded irises. Outer leaves on each fan suddenly hit the ground and a tan or cottony mass appears over leaf bases and adjacent soil and rhizomes. Spherical sclerotia soon materialize with white, tan or red colorings resembling mustard seeds. If these fruiting bodies are allowed to mature and explode, future control is much harder to obtain. This disease is driven by heat, humidity and abundant moisture. These factors have been present in recent Central Virginia weather patterns.

Chemical intervention is possible, but the new generation fungicides are expensive and probably not cost effective for home gardeners. I wrote about oxystrobin's efficacy in controlling this disease at my original Powhatan County, Virginia garden in a past AIS Region 4 Newscast article entitled "New Tools to Combat Southern Blight in Bearded Irises." Azoxystrobin or Heritage® produced by Syngenta gave excellent results. This fungicide tank mixed with Daconil® (contact) or Immunox® (systemic) fungicides also provided longer term fungal leaf spot control.

A less expensive control measure would be using a 10% chlorine bleach solution or 12,8 ounces per gallon. The mixture should be applied with a sprinkling can as a drench on iris fans in the affected clump. As a safety measure, neighboring clumps should also be treated. Daily observation is recommended and additional applications pursued after subsequent rain showers until fans are green and healthy again.

