



## PLECTOSPORIUM BLIGHT OF CUCURBITS

Plectosporium blight (Microdochium blight), caused by the fungus *Plectosporium tabacinum* (*Microdochium tabacinum*) is an important disease of pumpkin and squash. This disease was first reported in Tennessee in 1988. It was subsequently reported from most of the pumpkin growing areas in the United States. Plectosporium was first diagnosed in pumpkin fields in Illinois in 2000. The disease was observed in most of the pumpkin fields, causing more than 50% yield losses in some fields (Figure 1). The most susceptible cucurbits to Plectosporium blight are pumpkin, yellow squash, and zucchini squash.



Figure 1. *Plectosporium* blight of pumpkin, caused by *Plectosporium tabacinum*. Entire field is affected.

### SYMPTOMS

*Plectosporium tabacinum* infects stems, leaf veins, petioles, and fruit. Symptoms of Plectosporium blight are very distinctive. The disease is characterized by the production of light tan “bleached,” sunken, spindle-shaped lesions on the main stems, petioles, main leaf veins, and peduncles (Figure 2). Initially, the lesions are small, but they quickly coalesce, causing the entire surface of the stem or leaf vein to turn white (Figures 3 and 4). Because leaf lesions are restricted to the veins and do not



Figure 2. Spindle-shaped lesions on a petiole of pumpkin, caused by *Plectosporium tabacinum*.



Figure 3. Stem lesions of pumpkin, caused by *Plectosporium tabacinum*.

spread to the interveinal tissue, they may be overlooked in the early stages of disease development. Infected stems are dry and brittle. Leaves on the severely affected vines die and complete defoliation may occur in severe infections.

On fruit, the fungus causes white, tan, or silver russetting. Individual lesions are less than 1/4 inch in diameter, but often coalesce to form a continuous dry, scabby surface (Figure 5). Fruit stems may become entirely white at harvest (Figure 5).

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## DISEASE CYCLE

*Plectosporium tabacinum* survives in soil and plant debris between crops. The fungus produces two-celled, ellipsoidal to cylindrical and slightly curved spores. The spores are likely spread by rain-splash and wind and initiate infection upon landing on host tissues. Warm, wet weather favors disease development.

## DISEASE MANAGEMENT

No resistant pumpkin variety to *Plectosporium* blight has been reported. Rotation with noncucurbit crops for 3-4 years helps to reduce disease incidence. The disease is readily controlled by fungicide sprays. Chlorothalonil (e.g., Bravo) and pyraclostrobin (Cabron) provide effective control of *Plectosporium* blight in pumpkin fields. For up-to-date information on management of *Plectosporium* blight, refer to the current edition of publication number C1373, "Midwest Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers". This publication is available from ITCS, University of Illinois P345, 1917 S. Wright St., Champaign, IL 61820 or call 1-800-345-6087.



Figure 4. Lesions on leaf veins, caused by *Plectosporium tabacinum*.



Figure 5. Silver russeting on fruit and fruit stem of pumpkin, caused by *Plectosporium tabacinum*.