



Prince Edward County Master Gardeners

Powdery Mildew

As gardeners most of us are familiar with powdery mildew. It's a common problem and is caused, more often than not, by crowded stems and a damp or humid environment. The actual pathogen of powdery mildew is a fungus (*Erysiphe cichoracearum*)¹ Powdery mildew can effect a wide range of plants, the most susceptible are phlox and peonies. Powdery mildew is very easy to recognize since the upper part of the leaves display unmistakable white powdery spots. Powdery mildew is caused by a specialized fungus that feed on the plant's surface cells. It needs a environment of humidity and moderate temperatures for spore development. It begins to appears most often in the spring and, if untreated, by mid summer the infected leaves are usually brown and dropping off the plant.



There are plants that are less susceptible to powdery mildew, White David Phlox (*Phlox paniculata* 'David') is a good example. There are indeed hybrids that are less susceptible, but it does not mean the plant will never become infected.

Since powdery mildew spreads by wind, water (even raindrops), insects and soil, the most effective way of controlling it is to cut all the effected leaves, put them in the garbage or your local municipality's hot compost. Avoid overhead watering and do not fertilize with nitrogen in late summer to limit the plant's production of succulent tissue. Young plants are more susceptible than older plant tissue.

Cultural management plays a large role in managing this disease and the plants should be pruned or trimmed at the stems to avoid over crowding as the lack of air circulation is a factor in the development and spread.

Submitted by Ren Duinker

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