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Scented Geraniums: Proliferation of Basal Growth

A mass of growth with small leaves is the typical symptom of a leafy gall infection. Inspect your scented geranium stock plants now to avoid carrying over this bacterium.

During a spring 2015 extension trip, two stock plants of a citronella-scented geranium were observed with a mass of leafy growth at the base. These symptoms were the result of a leafy gall infection. Leafy galls are caused by the bacterium *Rhodococcus fascians*. Nora Catlin wrote an earlier e-GRO Alert #3-24 describing leafy gall symptoms on geraniums, wallflower and coreopsis. Her article also covered sanitation practices. Please refer to that Alert for additional details.

During grower visits this fall, I took the opportunity to inspect any scented

geraniums that were being held as stock plants. For many unique cultivars, this may be the only way to ensure cuttings will be



Scented geranium with leafy gall at base of plant.

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available of these older, non-patented plants.

Of the four operations that were holding scented geraniums for stock plants, two were found to have at least one cultivar with leafy gall. Nora Catlin pointed out that the bacterium is easily spread on propagation tools and during pruning. Once a plant is infected, the bacterium may survive in the plant for long periods of time before leafy gall symptoms even appear. There is no control for the disease

once a plant is infected. The reason for this, as pointed out by Melodie Putnam of Oregon State University, the bacteria are found within the plant cell (*see link to Oregon St. Univ. website below*). So pesticides applied to the plant surface will not eradicate the problem.

If you have infected plants, they should be discarded. During propagation and stock plant maintenance, hands and sanitation tools should be disinfected between each plant. Always



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Leafy gall mass at the base of a scented geranium plant.

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isolate the production of scented geraniums separately from zonal geraniums to avoid the potential of spreading leafy gall or bacterial wilt (*Xanthomonas campestris* pv. *pelargonii*).

Photographs of leafy gall symptoms on specialty geraniums are provided in this Alert. The best way to ensure next year's crop is healthy is to start with clean stock. Growers are encouraged to inspect plants being held for stock now to help eliminate this disease from your greenhouse.

Additional Resources

e-GRO Alert 3-24. Leafy Gall (*Rhodococcus fascians*) on Geranium, Wallflower, and Coreopsis

Demystifying *Rhodococcus fascians*

http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.oan.org/resource/resmgr/Digger2/Digger_201402_pp33-37_OSU.pdf

Oregon State University Plant Disease Clinic Website (a resource center of information about *Rhodococcus* and *Agrobacterium*).

<http://plant-clinic.bpp.oregonstate.edu/rhodococcus>



Initial signs of a leafy gall mass at the base of a plant.

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Advanced signs of a leafy gall infection (A,B) and close up of the leafy mass (C,D).