

POWDERY MILDREW

Powdery mildew, a white or light grey fungus, will show up first on the tops and undersides of vegetable plant leaves, but can eventually attack the whole plant, produce and all. (This differentiates powdery mildew from downy mildew, which is found only on the undersides of plant leaves.) Cucumber family plants (cucumber, squash, pumpkin, melon) are especially susceptible to infection.

Powdery mildew spores can overwinter in garden debris or on perennials and are spread by wind. Because the spores don't require direct contact with water to germinate, the disease thrives during the hot, dry days of mid to late summer. (Downy mildew, on the other hand, prefers wet conditions.)

Though most plants can tolerate some powdery mildew, the fungus can cause plants to produce less fruit than normal and affect the flavor of the fruit as well. Prevention is key, but if you find that powdery mildew has already emerged on your plants, fear not—there are ways to control its spread.

The first step to preventing infection is perhaps the most effective. Select resistant plant varieties, like Waltham butternut or multipik summer squash. If you have your heart set on a susceptible variety, coating unaffected plants once weekly with a homemade milk or baking soda spray is a wise preventative measure. Alternate sprays to help prevent the fungi from developing resistance and apply once weekly to the tops and bottoms of plant leaves. Reapply after rain.

Once infection occurs, remove infected foliage and trash (not compost!) debris to keep the fungus from spreading.

Milk solution: 1 part milk, 9 parts water

Baking soda solution: 1 tsp. soda, 1 quart water



Powdery mildew on squash leaves, top and right.

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The Organic Gardener's Handbook of natural Insect and Disease Control | Barbara W. Ellis and Fern Marshall Bradley