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PLANT DISEASES

RUST OF SNAPDRAGONS

By OLGA M. GOSS, Plant Pathologist

RUST is possibly the most destructive disease attacking antirrhinums or snapdragons. In Western Australia, the disease first appeared in 1955 and since that time has become very prevalent and widespread, frequently with devastating effects.

The fungus _Puccinia antirrhini_, attacks plants at any stage of growth—leaves, stems, buds and occasionally seed pods being subject to infection. The rust usually appears first on the leaves and later spreads to all other above ground parts. It first becomes obvious by the development of light coloured raised spots, which within a few days, break open to expose dusty brown to black masses of spores. On the leaves, the pustules are frequently circularly grouped, but on the stem they are elongated (see Figs. 1 and 2). Severe attacks kill the plants rapidly, while milder attacks disfigure the plants and reduce their vigour.

Development of the disease depends to a great extent on weather conditions. It is most likely to occur during spring and autumn, when cool morning temperatures are followed by warm days, especially when the leaves are moist with rain or dew. Hot dry conditions do not favour disease development.

Initial infection and spread from plant to plant is mainly by wind. By this means, transport for considerable distances can occur. Even if a first planting of snapdragons is being made in an isolated area, it is still possible for the disease to develop. Evidence of the rapidity of spread by wind is shown by the fact that the disease was first recorded in Australia in New South Wales late in 1952. Within two and a half years it had spread to every State in the Commonwealth and New Zealand.

Control

(1) Once established, the disease is difficult to control. For this reason
prevention should be attempted by regular weekly applications of either zineb or sulphur-containing sprays or dusts.

(2) Where treatment has been neglected and plants become severely affected, the only remedy is to pull up and burn all severely diseased plants.

(3) If available, use a resistant variety. Some progress has been made overseas in the breeding of resistant varieties and some of these may prove satisfactory under local conditions.

(4) If any plants are found to be free of the disease in a badly diseased planting, save seed from these for future plantings as they may have some resistance.

Fig. 2.—Close up of separate leaves showing the rust pustules concentrically arranged.
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