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CITRUS WATER SPOT

By H. L. HARVEY, B.Sc. (Agric.), Senior Plant Pathologist

WATER SPOT is a disease condition which reduces the quality of citrus fruit in Western Australian orchards during continuous wet winter weather. The problem is greatest in the Hills districts on navel oranges but mandarins may also be affected. Valencia oranges are rarely if ever affected.

Water spot is essentially a disease of mature fruits. For this reason the condition is aggravated by leaving mature fruits on the trees any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Symptoms

Symptoms of water spot occur mainly on the lower half of the fruit. They consist of soft, sodden areas not very different from the normal colour of the orange skin. Occasionally the stem end of the fruit is affected.

If a fairly long spell of fine weather occurs these areas lose their softness and dry up to a parchment texture rather darker than the normal orange colour. If on the other hand, wet weather continues, a growth of common moulds of various colours often develops on the affected areas. These cause a rotting of the fruit and instead of a limited area of soft tissue the moulds cause an extension of that area and may result in a complete collapse of the fruit.

Cause

Water spot is caused by the uptake of water by the rind of the fruit. When the fruit is continuously wet, water soaks into tiny cracks which develop in the skin and brings about the characteristic sodden condition of the skin which we know as water spot.

Two types of water spot markings on the lower halves of navel oranges.
The most important predisposing factor to the development of water spot is therefore prolonged exposure of the fruit on the tree to winter rains. Important also is the stage of fruit maturity. As this is a disease of mature fruit, the holding of such fruit on the trees increases the water spot hazard.

It has been shown also that on trees sprayed with white oil for scale control the rate of water spot development is increased. However, given time and sufficiently wet conditions, water spot develops as badly on unsprayed trees as on sprayed trees.

Control

As water spot is a disease that is the direct result of prolonged wet weather little can be done to arrest the trouble while the fruit is still hanging. However, water spot development can be minimised by picking fruits immediately they are ready to harvest and removing them to dry shed conditions.

A number of orchardists who have suffered navel orange crop losses from water spot have changed a percentage of their trees to the Valencia variety, which is not affected. This is a sound practical measure which could be considered by orchardists in districts which have a history of severe water spot incidence.

Water spot invaded by common black mould. This is a later stage than the previous illustrations.
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