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WHITE RUST OF GERBERAS

By R. F. DOEPEL, B.Sc. (Agric.), Plant Pathologist

WHITE rust has proved to be a most damaging fungal disease of Gerberas. Frequent fungicidal sprays are recommended for susceptible varieties in late winter and spring.

The white rust fungus (*Albugo tragopogonis*) was first found on gerberas at Darlington in 1957. It has since become widespread throughout the metropolitan area and beyond. Varieties differ markedly in their reaction to the disease, some show little or no infection while others are almost defoliated.

**Symptoms and Spread**

The disease becomes obvious in late winter as raised white blisters or pustules on the under surface of leaves (Fig. 1). Reddish purple areas or spots develop on the upper surface corresponding to the blisters beneath.

Rapid spread of the fungus in the spring can result in serious defoliation of susceptible varieties. Further development of the disease is usually checked with the advent of hot dry weather.

**Control**

**Resistant Varieties**

Where possible varieties showing resistance to the disease should be propagated or obtained for future plantings.

**Fertiliser Use**

Avoid the excessive use of nitrogenous fertilisers or manures as these appear to increase the susceptibility of the plants to the disease.

**Garden Hygiene**

Leaves killed by the white rust fungus and also those that are badly affected should be removed and burnt.

**Fungicidal Sprays**

As the fungus is very difficult to control when once established protective spraying should be commenced in late winter before the disease becomes evident.

Weekly sprays with zineb* or maneb*, at a strength of 1 oz. in 4 gallons water, should be applied to susceptible varieties. Particular attention should be given to spraying the undersides of leaves.

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