

Viburnum Downy Mildew Blight of Awabuki (Mirror-leaf) Viburnum Doug Caldwell



*Downy mildew (*Plasmopara viburni*) disease causes these spots and defoliation on Awabuki viburnum. Clean-up of fallen leaves will help reduce future disease severity.*



Left: Symptoms of downy mildew blight include irregular shaped spots and blotches, distorted leaves and defoliation. Above: This whitish growth on the undersides of the leaves produces spores which spread the disease.

During our cool January and February nights and foggy mornings, downy mildew (*Plasmopara viburni*) disease established a foothold in many communities. There are scattered, 50 foot stretches of defoliated awabuki viburnum (*Viburnum odoratissimum* var. *awabuki*) hedges with 80% defoliation in many communities. Check your hedges as some hedges looked fine from a 20 foot distance, but upon closer inspection, the leaf blight becomes evident. The defoliation appears to be worse in sunny sections as opposed to shady sections.



The irrigation on this awabuki hedge probably contributed to the spread of the disease. Another disease, Cercospora leaf spot causes a distinct ½ inch leaf spot with a bright yellow halo on the top of the leaf. Different fungicides are needed for the Cercospora leaf spot disease. Photo: S. Brown, Lee Co.

Awabuki (commonly referred to as mirror-leaf viburnum) is a variety of sweet viburnum. This South Korean native has been around since 1987 or so and can be recognized the big, dark green shiny leaves as well as the green pepper fragrance of crushed leaves. During cool, humid winter nights the downy mildew pathogen moves in on weak plants and causes spotting and bronzy blotching (light green to reddish-brown to black), yellowing, distorted leaves and defoliation. This is a minor disease usually, but it has caused extensive defoliation when the weather is cool and humid. Once the hotter days of late spring arrive, the disease tends to dissipate.

Two key points in control are removal of fallen infected leaves: get those out of your landscape and do not compost! Good luck! And secondly, check that the sprinkler system is not directly hitting the foliage. The water will disperse the spores and the disease will consume more of your hedge.

If you feel you need to apply a fungicide, use products labeled for ornamentals. Dr. Aaron Palmateer (IFAS-UF Homestead Research and Education Center) recommends repeated applications of any one of the following:

Aliette WDG 3.5 lb/100 gallons of water
Heritage 3 oz./100 gallons of water
Insignia 6 oz./100 gallons of water

It may be too late to save some of these hedges from defoliation, but they will refoliate as soon as we get warmer nights (mid-April?). In the future, it would be wise to make note of where these outbreaks are and when (if) we have these cool, foggy nights starting in January through early March, be ready to go with the fungicides. This is a hard situation to predict and a tough pathogen (water mold species) to manage. Stay tuned for a YouTube video on this.

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