

Leaf and Flower Gall of Azalea and Camellia

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Leaf and flower gall is a disease that is common on azaleas and camellias in the spring. The disease has also been reported on other members of the plant family Ericaceae. It occurs in home landscapes and nurseries, and is often seen on flame azaleas in the forest in the spring. The disease is caused by species of the fungus *Exobasidium*.

Symptoms

Species of the fungus *Exobasidium* cause cells in leaf and flower tissue to multiply rapidly. Tissues become swollen and distorted and develop a waxy texture. Large, fleshy galls may form on infected plant tissue. Infected leaf tissue may be pale green in color during the early stages of the disease; infected flowers may be pinkish. Later in the season, a white spore layer covers the infected plant



Fig. 1. Leaf and flower gall on camellia showing early and late stages of the disease, with white spore production on some leaves. (Photo by M. A. Hansen)



Fig. 2. Leaf galls on flame azalea caused by the fungus *Exobasidium vaccinii*. (Photo by J. Bush)

parts. Galls eventually turn brown, shrink and harden as the season progresses. Lower leaves on plants are usually the most seriously damaged, but under humid conditions and in shaded locations galls may occur at the ends of upper branches.

Disease Cycle

The occurrence and intensity of the disease depends on weather conditions and the prevalence of *Exobasidium* spores in the area. Spores produced on the surface of galls in late spring to early summer are blown and washed to leaf and flower buds where they may cause secondary infections of expanding buds on neighboring plants. Some spores overwinter on the plants and infect young leaves and flower buds the following spring. Cool, wet weather and high humidity favor dispersal of the spores.

Control

Cultural Control

When only a few plants are involved, as in a home planting or a small greenhouse area, the disease is easily controlled by hand picking the galls and burning or burying them. To prevent new infections, it is important to pick the galls before the white spore layer appears.

Chemical Control

Fungicide control is generally not warranted in home landscapes. In commercial operations, a combination of hand picking of the galls and application of a fungicide containing the active ingredient, mancozeb, in early spring before new galls develop may be warranted. Refer to the current Virginia Pest Management Guide for Horticultural and Forest Crops (<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-017/456-017.html>) for details on fungicide control. For information on the proper use of pesticides and fungicides, refer to any current Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) pest management guide.

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