

Bacterial Leaf Blight of Syngonium

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Syngonium podophyllum is a popular indoor foliage container plant often grown on a totem pole for support or as a cascading hanging plant. Commonly called an “arrow-leaf” plant, the most widely grown cultivar is ‘White Butterfly’, but ‘Green Gold’ and ‘Cream’ are also popular. *Syngonium podophyllum* is very susceptible to a bacterium called *Xanthomonas campestris*, which causes bacterial leaf blight. The bacterium enters the leaves through wounds or natural openings such as stomata. Many bacterial organisms are normally present on plant surfaces but only cause problems when environmental conditions are favorable for their multiplication and growth. This disease tends to be worse during the winter months when the sun’s duration and intensity are reduced. Other stressors that predispose plants to infection include irregular watering, poor soil drainage, fertilizer imbalances, and fluctuating temperatures.

The most obvious evidence of this disease is the presence of irregular dark and water-soaked areas between the major veins of the leaf. These leaf lesions are often delineated by the veins, giving them an “angular” appearance. This symptom usually appears first during the early hours of the morning and disappears as the day progresses. After a few days, these water-soaked areas become yellow then brown. They develop a dry, papery consistency causing portions of the leaf to fall out, leaving a tattered appearance. A yellow border will often appear between the dead area and surrounding area. Entire leaves may be killed by the bacterial infection, leaving a dried petiole attached to the stem after the leaf shrivels.

Avoid high humidity, poor air circulation, and plant crowding. Also avoid misting plants since it will provide a habitable water film for the bacteria. Infected leaves should be removed with scissors, but the blades should be disinfected before each cut with a fresh solution of one part household bleach and nine parts water. Since bleach may be corrosive to some metals, lightly oil the blades afterward.

When this foliage plant is grown under greenhouse conditions, every effort to minimize wet foliage should be made. Frequent hand washing will reduce the spread of the bacterium. Avoid excessive handling of diseased plants. Destroy infected plant material. Chemical control of bacterial blight of *Syngonium* has not been successful, so good sanitation is essential.

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