

# Blueberry Diseases

## Blueberry Dieback & Root Rot

This fungus thrives in waterlogged soils, both in containers and in the open ground. The variety 'Top Hat' is particularly susceptible to this disease. As the infection spreads, the roots of the plant collapse and decay. The plant will display a general lack of vigour, the leaves will turn yellow, then red, before excessive defoliation occurs. The plant will eventually collapse and die. Once established in the soil, this disease is difficult to eradicate. Lasting control is accomplished by improving drainage.

## Blueberry Stem Blight

This disease caused by the fungus *Botryosphaeria dothidea* and is most common on one and two year old plants. The reddening/browning of leaves followed by sudden wilting and death of an isolated stem is usually the first sign that this fungus is present. This is often followed by death of the entire plant as the fungus spreads down to its base. Infected stems will have a light brown discolouration down the infected side of the stem. Stems recently killed by the fungus do not drop their leaves, resulting in a brown-leafed 'flag' which stands out against the green healthy portions of the bush. After a few weeks the stems drop their leaves and turn almost black in colour.

Infections are usually associated with a wound caused by pruning or insect damage or late autumn/early spring frost injuries to young shoots. Avoid stimulating too much vulnerable young growth late in the season by not feeding plants after mid summer. Spores are carried by wind and rain from infected stems to the wounds on healthy plants. Controlling the disease requires cutting out infected stems to well below the infected tissue. After a stem is cut off, the cut end of the stem should be examined. If any brown areas are visible in this cross section, the cut must be made again further down the stem until all infected tissue is removed. The prunings should be removed well away from the plant and burned.