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Watch for Devastating Rose Virus

by Lydia Holley

Roses are a commonly grown garden shrub, and are loved by many. Unfortunately, there is a virus that is devastating public and commercial rose plantings. If you have roses in your garden, you need to be aware of this virus and its symptoms.



The virus is called rose rosette, sometimes referred to as RRD (rose rosette disease) or RRV (rose rosette virus). Rose rosette is thought to be transferred by mites called eriophyid mites. These mites are almost impossible to detect with the naked eye. In roses that are grown closely together, the mites can crawl from rose to rose. However, these tiny mites can also simply be carried by the wind to other gardens.

Most of the time, a rose with rose rosette will exhibit several symptoms. Masses of twisted, deformed, and stunted growth, called witches broom, is one symptom. Another symptom is rose canes with soft, rubbery thorns, excessive thorniness, malformed flowers, or branches that stay soft instead of hardening.

There is no known cure for rose rosette, although scientists are working hard to find one. Rose rosette is always fatal. If you detect rose rosette early enough on a rose, while it is localized to only one cane, you may be able to save the rose by completely removing the cane. If, however, the rose continues to exhibit symptoms, it will need to be dug up and burned.

If you can not burn the diseased rose, seal it in plastic before sending it to a landfill. Do not compost. Replanting is possible, but all roots of the affected rose need to be removed first in order to prevent infecting a new rose, or allowing an infected rose to regrow from an old root.

With rose rosette, early identification is best. Be vigilant in monitoring the roses in your own garden. Notify the groundskeeper or gardener if you see symptoms of rose rosette on roses in other private gardens, garden centers, or commercial, highway or public plantings.

Of course, not all abnormal growth is due to rose rosette. There are several causes of abnormal growth in a rose. Even herbicide damage can mimic some of the symptoms of rose rosette.

If you see abnormal growth on your roses, do not panic, but certainly do not ignore it. If it is rose rosette, you do not want to help continue the spread of this disease. Although rose rosette is always fatal, the rose may survive for several years. Mites can then feed off this diseased rose and spread it to other roses. Quick detection and action is best.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.