



Corn Smut

Overview

Corn smut is a fungal disease, with spores that can survive in soil and corn residue. Corn smut is generally not economically detrimental, except in sweet corn, because it makes the crop aesthetically unappealing for fresh market sale.

What you should know

- Common corn smut is caused by the fungus *Ustilago maydis*.
- Corn smut spores can survive for years in soil and corn residue.
- Spores are spread by wind or through water splashing up onto young plants. Spores can also be spread through the manure of animals that have eaten infected corn.
- Corn smut causes tumor-like galls on corn ears, kernels, tassels, husks, leaves, stalks and buds. Most galls are fleshy and smooth, silvery-white to green and up to 4-5 inches in diameter. As galls mature, their outsides become papery and their insides become powdery and black. Galls eventually rupture, releasing the powder (spores).
- Corn smut infects corn ears via silks, but the fungus can also enter plants through wounds caused by insects, hail or machinery. Infection risk is greater in warm weather and in low-fertility soils or those with excessive nitrogen.

Action steps

1. **Fungicides won't help:** Fungicides are not effective against corn smut. You can remove and burn or bury smut galls before they burst to prevent spores from spreading and overwintering.
2. **Plant tolerant hybrids:** Some new varieties have tolerance, but can still develop corn smut during hot, dry summers.
3. **Use best management practices:** Avoid injuring plants to reduce possible fungus entry points. Maintain well-balanced soil fertility, specifically nitrogen. Rotate crops to allow time for spores to die off in the soil.

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/common-corn-smut/>

http://vegetablemdonline.ppath.cornell.edu/factsheets/Corn_Smut.htm

For more information, contact:

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Common corn smut causes tumor-like galls filled with a sooty powder (spores).



30-Second Summary

- Corn smut is a fungus that produces fleshy galls that turn papery and sooty.
- Corn smut can enter plants through the silks and through insect, hail or machinery damage.
- Fungicides are ineffective against corn smut, but tolerant hybrids and management practices can help reduce the risk.

NOTES:
