



Coconut Research Institute of Sri Lanka



Advisory Circular No B 11

LEAF BLIGHT DISEASE AND ITS CONTROL

Leaf blight disease, also known as grey blight, is common in neglected lands in all coconut growing areas. The disease is particularly prevalent in weak or neglected palms. Two parasitic fungi known as *Pestalozzia palmarum* and *Bipolaris incurvata* (earlier known as *Drechslera incurvata* or *Helminthosporium incurvatum*) are associated with the disease.

Symptoms

In the early stages of the disease, yellowish brown tiny spots appear on leaflets (Picture 1). These spots gradually enlarge and turn grey, and the peripheral areas of spots become dark brown. As the disease advances, the patches coalesce to form large brown areas, and leaflets appear dried (Picture 2). The symptoms are predominant on the lower fronds.



Picture 1: Yellowish brown spots on affected leaflets

Seedlings and young palms are very susceptible to leaf blight disease. The palms are predisposed to the disease by conditions such as dry weather, excessive nitrogen and water logging.



Picture 2: A close view of a leaflet with large grey patches with dark brown margin

Control

Generally, leaf blight in older palms is not serious. However, outbreaks in seedlings and young palms can cause damage to foliage resulting in a setback in their growth.

As leaf blight appears in weak or neglected palms, it is necessary to ensure that normal fertilizer application is carried out on schedule. If the disease occurs in fertilized lands, an additional dose of Muriate of Potash (or Ash) should be supplied at the following rates, at six monthly intervals when the soil is wet, until fresh symptoms cease to appear.

	Seedlings /Young palms	Adult palms
Muriate of Potash (60% K ₂ O)	250 g	500 g
Kitchen Ash	5 kg	10 kg

If the disease continuous to spread after the application of fertilizer, then a fungicidal treatment may be considered. But this is a rare necessity. For this purpose Bordeaux mixture or any commercially available copper fungicide could be used.

Coconut palms can be kept free of disease by carrying out proper management practices.

Bordeaux mixture is prepared as follows: (use earthenware vessels)

Copper sulphate	200 g
Quick lime	200 g
Water	25 liters

Dissolve copper sulphate overnight in 5 liters of water (suspend in a bag to facilitate dissolving). Suspend lime separately in 20 liters of water, and strain through a fine cloth. Add copper sulphate to lime, stirring vigorously. Use immediately after preparation.

Note: Both Bordeaux mixture and Copper fungicides are toxic and should be handled with care.