

Soybean Seedling Diseases

- Soybean seedling diseases are often caused by fungal pathogens, which can slow germination and plant growth, and kill seedlings.
- Conditions that favor disease development are cool to warm temperatures and wet, poorly drained soils.
- Once the pathogens that cause diseases are present within the environment they cannot be eliminated and must be managed to reduce yield loss.

Diseases, Pathogens, and Symptoms

There are three main categories of soybean seedling diseases:

Seed rot (V0-VE growth stages):

- Fungal pathogens: *Pythium*, *Phytophthora*, and *Phomopsis*.
- Typical symptoms: soft decay of the seed and missing seedlings in the row or poor emergence.

Seedling mortality (damping-off or seedling blight) (VE-V4 growth stages):

- Fungal pathogens: *Pythium* (Figure 1), *Phytophthora* (Figure 2), *Rhizoctonia* (Figure 3), and sometimes *Fusarium*.
- Typical symptoms: hypocotyl appears pinched and rotted. Yellowed and wilted leaves later turn brown. Leaves remain attached to the stem after plant death.



Figure 1. *Pythium* damping-off exhibiting a typical brownish water-soaked lesion on the hypocotyl and disintegrated secondary roots.



Figure 2. Above ground damping-off symptoms in soybean. Photo courtesy of Daren Mueller, Iowa State University, Bugwood.org.

Root and lower stem decay (VE-V6 growth stages):

- Fungal pathogens: *Phytophthora*, *Rhizoctonia*, and sometimes *Fusarium*.
- Typical symptoms: brown to reddish-brown necrotic lesions on stem and rotted roots.



Figure 3. Characteristic reddish lesions on the stem of soybean plants infected with *Rhizoctonia*.

Disease Management

Diseases are difficult to control after they develop. Therefore, the most inexpensive, efficient, and effective disease control procedures are preventive. Remember, any factor that delays germination or seedling emergence provides increased opportunity for disease infection.

Management of soybean seedling diseases includes:

- Avoid planting in environmental conditions that promote disease (cool temperatures (less than 68° F), wet, and/or compacted soils).
- Plant high quality, professionally grown seed that is disease free.
- Use fungicide seed treatments. Acceleron® Seed Treatment Products for soybean contain fluxapyroxad, metalaxyl, and pyraclostrobin, and can provide excellent control of *Pythium*, *Phytophthora*, *Rhizoctonia*, and *Fusarium*.

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- Plant resistant or tolerant soybeans (*Phytophthora* only). A seed treatment should be used with tolerant soybean products.
- Rotations with a grass crop (corn or sorghum) for several years can help to reduce disease inoculum in the soil.
- Fungal pathogens can survive by overwintering in plant debris and in the soil; therefore, diseases may be more problematic in fields where no-till or reduced-till is practiced and in fields with high amounts of plant residue.
- Use good agricultural practices to reduce plant stress.

Disease Identification

Identification of the specific pathogen that is causing the disease can help with management decisions for the following year and whether or not fungicide treated seed will be needed for a replant. Consider the following information for each field to help distinguish which pathogen is present:

- General soil temperatures.
- General soil moisture (saturated, wet, or dry).
- Soybean product resistance or tolerance to *Phytophthora*.
- Plant growth stage.

For assistance determining if a disease is present and the specific pathogen that caused it, contact your state Plant Disease Clinic.

Sources:

¹ Esker, P. Common soybean seedling diseases. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

² Yang, X.B. 2009. Scouting soybean seedling diseases. Iowa State University Extension. Integrated Crop Management News.

Distinguishing between *Pythium*, *Phytophthora*, and *Rhizoctonia* damping-off

Pythium

- Hypocotyl will appear rotted. Leaves of infected seedlings will turn brown before dying. Stems are soft and watery.
- Common in wet, poorly drained, compacted soils.
- More common in cooler temperatures (50-60° F).

Phytophthora

- Symptoms are very similar to *Pythium* infection.
- Symptoms usually appear above the soil line.
- Common in wet, poorly drained, compacted soils.
- More common in warm temperatures (80° F).

Rhizoctonia

- Localized reddish-brown lesions can be seen in the cortical layer of the main root or hypocotyl. Stems remain firm and dry.
- Symptoms usually appear below the soil line.
- Common in moist (but not saturated) soil conditions.
- Common in warm temperatures (80° F).

For additional agronomic information, please contact your local seed representative.

Individual results may vary, and performance may vary from location to location and from year to year. This result may not be an indicator of results you may obtain as local growing, soil and weather conditions may vary. Growers should evaluate data from multiple locations and years whenever possible.

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