Cercospora Leaf Spot and Berry Blotch of Coffee

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Cercospora leaf spot (a.k.a. brown eyespot) and berry blotch are two phases of a common disease caused by the plant-pathogenic fungus *Cercospora coffeicola*. The disease can be economically important in Hawai‘i at some locations or in some seasons due to the costs associated with managing it and to its damaging effects on plant growth, coffee cherry yield, and bean quality. In Spanish the diseases are called mancha ocular del cafeto and mancha de hierro.

**Host plant**
*Coffea arabica* L. (Arabica coffee) is among about 40 *Coffea* species in the family Rubiaceae that can be affected by this disease. *C. arabica* is a shrub or small tree grown for its beverage-yielding seeds. Its shiny, oval, pointed leaves are 3–6 inches long. Its flowers are white, fragrant, and massed in thick clusters at leaf axils along the wide-spreading branches. The genus originates from the Old World tropics, especially Africa. *C. arabica* is a native of tropical Africa and is now cultivated throughout the tropics; it grows wild on a number of islands in the Pacific.

**Pathogen**
The fungus *Cercospora coffeicola* Berk. & Cooke is distributed throughout the tropics and subtropics, including Hawai‘i. There is morphological variation among *Cercospora* isolates from coffee in Hawai‘i. The fungus’ fruiting is amphigenous, occurring mostly on the upper leaf surface. Its stromata are slight to 50 µm in diameter, globular, and dark brown. Its conidiophores are in fascicles, 3–30 stalks, pale to medium brown, sometimes branched, septate, mildly to abruptly geniculate, 20–275 x 4–6 µm. The conidial scars are distinct and thickened. The conidia are hyaline, acicular to obclavate, nearly straight, with an acute apex and truncate or subtruncate base with a conspicuous, thickened hilum, indistinct multiseptate, 40–150 x 2–4 (–7) µm.

Pathogen dispersal is by spores (conidia) that are windborne (mostly during the daytime) and may also be spread by splashing rain and human contact such as movement of workers and by machinery within coffee fields and nurseries. The highest risk for infection occurs when the temperature range is 20–28°C (68–82.4°F) and there are from 36 to 72 hours of continuous environmental wetness. Factors that predispose the plant to infection include
- poor plant nutrition (low leaf nitrogen and potassium)
- general plant stress (drought, sun exposure, poor fertilizer management, or excessive weed competition)
- insufficient shade
- glyphosate (herbicide) injury
- poor soil or growth medium
- root diseases (e.g., coffee nematode decline, caused by root-knot nematodes; Rhizoctonia root rot).
Disease symptoms and signs

Leaves
The classic leaf symptom is circular spots with tan, gray, or white centers; lesions may be irregular in shape and cause leaf blight. Lesions begin as small, chlorotic spots that expand to become deep brown on the upper leaf surface. The centers of the spots turn grayish-white and are encircled by a distinct ring (0.2–0.6 inches in diameter) of brown tissue. The margins of the lesions are dark brown to reddish brown or purplish to black in color. Lesions are sometimes surrounded or ringed by a bright yellowish “halo,” which is more visibly apparent on the upper leaf surface. Dark-colored and silvery-colored sporulation of the pathogen may be visible to the naked eye within the grayish-white centers of lesions. Affected leaves may defoliate prematurely.

Green berries
Lesions on berries are initially brown in color, sunken, longitudinal or irregular or oval in shape, with ashy centers, rarely 0.2 inches and sometimes encircled by a purplish halo (the halo is tissue which ripens prematurely due to the infection). Infections can occur at any stage of berry development.

Red cherries
Large, sunken, blackened areas develop, which may be covered with a silvery sheen of fungal spores. Infections that penetrate to the seed may cause the pulp to adhere to the parchment during processing, causing damage to the product. Diseased cherries may be subject to attack and further degradation by opportunistic bacteria or fungi such as Colletotrichum gloeosporioides (a ubiquitous fungus that causes anthracnose of many crops). The conspicuous presence of C. gloeosporioides as an opportunist and secondary invader of cherries damaged first by C. coffeicola can confuse the disease diagnosis. As a result, in Hawai‘i some coffee farmers erroneously refer to the disease caused C. coffeicola as “anthracnose.”

Crop damage
Damage to leaves causes defoliation, reduced photosynthetic leaf area, and loss of plant vigor. Damage to cherries and seeds (beans), when the disease is severe, leads to general crop loss (yield reduction, berry shriveling, premature berry drop, premature ripening, and reduced coffee grade). Coffee beans may be stained or

Typical “brown eyespots,” a diagnostic symptom.

Premature ripening of diseased cherries, a symptom and a damaging effect of Cercospora berry blotch disease. Prematurely ripened fruits usually are not picked on time and therefore constitute crop loss.

Cercospora berry blotch on mature coffee berries.
off-grade and parts of the cherry pulp may adhere to the parchment, resulting in difficulty in coffee milling, discolored parchment and beans, and a sour taste of the processed beans.

**Integrated pest management practices (IPM) for Cercospora leaf spot and berry blotch**

- Maintain adequate plant nutrition (coffee plants suffering from elemental deficiencies such as nitrogen and potassium are more susceptible to this disease). In fact, the disease may be effectively prevented or controlled in most locations with a proper fertility regime.
- Perform periodic coffee plant tissue analysis and soil testing to determine the appropriate fertilizer regime; this can be based upon UH-CTAHR Agricultural Diagnostic Service Center (ADSC) recommendations.
- Practice sanitation and crop debris management: after pruning coffee plants, remove crop debris from the field, do not pile it up against the plants in the field or leave it between rows (leaf and berry debris can harbor the pathogen and initiate further cycles of Cercospora leaf and berry disease).
- Choose the planting location to avoid very high elevations and rainy locations where disease may tend to occur; orient rows so they are perpendicular to prevailing winds, so plant canopies and leaves become dry more quickly after rainfall.
- Select a reasonable planting density (number of plants per acre).
- Don’t intercrop coffee with other Coffea species.
New re-growth after pruning (left) is susceptible to infection. At high, cloudy, wet altitudes (>2000 ft) in Hawai‘i, leaf spots may become leaf blights, causing more damage (right).

- Strive to minimize plant stresses such as drought, under-nutrition, planting on impermeable rock outcappings, root-knot nematodes, and root rot; these predispose coffee plants to infection.
- Provide or ensure adequate soil drainage (this minimizes root rot).
- Grow coffee under shade (35–65%), or in an agroforestry setting.
- Avoid over-irrigation (this will minimize plant stresses such as root rot and will reduce relative humidity within the plant canopy).
- Avoid working with coffee plants and moving through fields and nurseries when diseased plants are wet (this minimizes potential dispersal of fungal conidia within and among moist plants).
- Prune coffee trees to increase air circulation in the canopy.
- Harvest cherries on time, before disease progresses too far.
- Avoid injuring coffee plants with herbicides, especially glyphosate (plants injured by this herbicide may be more susceptible to infection due to nutritional deficiencies).
- Control weeds (this minimizes plant stress and relative humidity in the plant canopy).
- Apply fungicide sprays to foliage where environmental conditions are particularly conducive to infection and disease development (please refer to Fungicide Recommendations below).
- Avoid planting coffee transplants too deep in soils.
- Protect new coffee foliage re-growth with fungicide sprays after pruning (immature leaves are more susceptible to infection than mature leaves).

**Fungicide options**

In Hawai‘i, copper fungicides such as Kocide products (see table) are normally used against this pathogen. It is important to protect the fruits from the leaf phase of the disease. For Kocide 101 products, use from 1.5–6 pounds of product per acre in 50–100 gallons of water. Add a
### Table 1. Some fungicides registered for coffee in Hawai‘i (2008) for control of Cercospora leaf spot and berry blotch

(source: Hawaii Pesticide Information Retrieval System; always consult the product’s label before using the product).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product name</th>
<th>Active ingredient</th>
<th>Formulation*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champ Formula 2 Flowable Agricultural Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (37.5%)</td>
<td>FC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion Wettable Powder Agricultural Fungicide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (77%)</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion WG Agricultural Fungicide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (77%)</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPont Kocide 101 Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (77%)</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPont Kocide 2000 Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (53.8%)</td>
<td>WDG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPont Kocide 4.5 LF Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (53.8%)</td>
<td>WDG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPont Kocide DF Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (61.4%)</td>
<td>WDG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Kocide 2000 Fungicide/Bactericide,</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (53.8%)</td>
<td>WDG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Kocide 2000 T/N/O Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (61.4%)</td>
<td>WDG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Kocide 101 Fungicide Wettable Powder</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (77%)</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Kocide LF Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (23%)</td>
<td>EC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin Kocide 4.5 LF Fungicide/Bactericide</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (37.5%)</td>
<td>FC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu-Cop 50WP</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (77%)</td>
<td>WP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu-Cop 50 HB</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (77%)</td>
<td>EC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu-Cop 50 DF</td>
<td>Copper hydroxide (77%)</td>
<td>WDG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey Liqui-Cop Copper Fungicidal Garden Spray</td>
<td>Tetraaminecopper (31.4%)</td>
<td>EC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*EC = emulsifiable concentrate; WP = wettable powder; WDG = water dispersible granules; FC = flowable concentrate

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spray adjuvant or “spreader/sticker” product such as the organosilicate Tactic™ (1% v/v) to enhance coverage and product adhesion to foliage. Sprays should coincide with dry weather and calm winds. Three spray applications per season should suffice (occurring approximately once per month), beginning at flowering. Thorough coverage of the plant canopy is very important. Large farms in Hawai‘i utilize tractor-mounted mist blowers. Always refer to the fungicide label(s) for instructions and personal protective equipment and proper site of application (for example, copper fungicides should be applied to leaves, and not to roots). Be aware that use of copper fungicides may eliminate fungi that perform biological control of the green scale (*Coccus viridis*) insect pest of coffee.

### General disease notes

Symptoms of Cercospora berry blotch disease may be confused with a condition of coffee referred to as “over-bearing dieback.”

The yellow halo around lesions is caused by a toxin produced by *Cercospora* species, known as cercosporin. Premature ripening of infected berries and cherries occurs due to ethylene gas emission during the disease process. Ethylene is a plant-ripening, or senescence, hormone that is also produced by some plant-pathogenic fungi during infection and disease development.

Some farmers in Hawai‘i confuse Cercospora berry blotch with “anthracnose,” when in fact the opportunistic and ubiquitous anthracnose fungus (*C. gloeosporioides*) tends not to be the primary agent, but rather a secondary invader of tissues already damaged by *C. coffeicola*.

### References


Daub, M.E., and M. Ehrenshaft. 2000. The photoacti-


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