Gooseberry mildew and sawfly

GWF211
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American gooseberry mildew and gooseberry sawfly can cause serious problems, but controls are available and preventative measures can be taken.

Q What is gooseberry mildew?

A There are two forms of this fungal disease. American gooseberry mildew (*Sphaerotheca mors-uvae*), which was introduced to Britain around 1900, is common and debilitating. European gooseberry mildew (*Microsphaera grossulariae*) is less common and much less severe in its effects.

Q How can I recognise the disease?

A American gooseberry mildew appears as a white powder on young shoots and rapidly spreads to older leaves and shoots. The plant can turn greyish-white all over, with distorted shoot tips that may also die back. It affects the fruit, rendering them brown and felty with age. The mildew can be scraped off affected fruit; they are still edible, though are often small and tasteless.

European mildew produces a light powdering and may well go unnoticed in summer, but is normally visible as dark spots on fallen leaves in winter.

Q Is gooseberry mildew found on other plants?

A It affects some blackcurrants, but other plants can be affected by other types of mildew.

Q How serious is American gooseberry mildew?

A It is rarely fatal, but it weakens the plant and spoils the fruit.

Q What's the best way to control it?

A Prune out badly affected shoots and fruit.

Q Can any preventive measures be taken?

A Do not feed unless the bushes crop poorly, then use sulphate of potash (70g per sq m) rather than growmore.

Prune the bushes to thin growth in the centre and remove overcrowded shoots to help prevent the humid air conditions in which the disease thrives.

There are chemicals approved for use on fruit, but in our trials they were not sufficiently effective for us to recommend.

If blackcurrants are affected, collect up and burn fallen leaves, as the spores overwinter on them. This is not worthwhile with gooseberries as the spores overwinter in the buds.

When planting new bushes, choose an open, sunny spot and do not overcrowd them.

Q Are there any resistant varieties?

A 'Greenfinch', 'Invicta' and the red varieties 'Pax' and 'Rokula' have some resistance to American gooseberry mildew.

Q What is gooseberry sawfly?

A A common gooseberry pest, the larvae do the damage.

Q How do I recognise this pest?

A Sawfly larvae look similar to caterpillars, but they have shinier skins and, in addition to the three pairs of legs at the front, each other segment of the body has a pair of fleshy pro-legs. They are pale green and grow up to 20mm long; two species are covered with small, black spots.

Three species of sawfly affect gooseberries: gooseberry sawfly (*Nematus ribesii*); pale gooseberry sawfly (*Pristiphora pallipes*) and lesser gooseberry sawfly (*N.leucotrochus*).

Q Tell me more about gooseberry sawfly.

A Overwintering pupae hatch in April and lay eggs on the young leaves in rows parallel to the main vein. The larvae feed voraciously for about a month, and then pupate. The flies

emerge three weeks later. Each year two or three generations develop.

Q What damage do gooseberry sawfly do?

A The sawfly larvae eat their way through the leaves from the edge inwards, often leaving the midrib. When they occur in large numbers they are able to defoliate a bush within a week. The fruit is not affected, but the loss of a significant number of leaves will lessen the vigour of the bush and may reduce fruiting the following year.

Q Will it attack other plants?

A Gooseberry sawfly also attacks red- and whitecurrants, and a close relation feeds on blackcurrants.

Q How can I control this pest?

A Check bushes regularly. Eggs are often laid low down in the centre of the bush, so it's easy to miss the larvae until lots of damage has been done. The simplest control is to pick off the larvae by hand. Alternatively, use an insecticide approved for fruit containing rotenone, *pyrethrins* or *thiacloprid*. The biological caterpillar control *Bacillus thuringiensis* does not work against sawfly larvae. Even after controlling an outbreak, keep checking the bushes, as surviving larvae will become adults in a few weeks, ready to start the life cycle again.

Chemical information

Brand names of garden products change frequently, whereas the active chemical ingredient in them usually doesn't. Because of this, we list the active chemical ingredient recommended for a given problem, rather than the brand name of the product. The only exception is when we have tested a brand and chosen it as a **Best Buy**. If you need any more information on chemicals, please ask for our factsheet GWF281