

Powdery Mildew

Powdery Mildew can be a real problem in the vegetable garden, especially for cucurbits such as cucumbers, squash, melons and pumpkins. Powdery mildew is a fungus that forms as a white or gray powder on the leaves of plants causing the leaves to become deformed and die. It is far more probable in areas that are damp, are somewhat shady, and have higher levels of humidity.

It is difficult to control powdery mildew once it begins spreading on the plant leaves. This makes it very important to use proactive measures in your vegetable garden to prevent powdery mildew. Here are some ways to prevent powdery mildew from overtaking your cucurbits.



Plant cucurbits in full sunlight. The powdery mildew spores have a difficult time surviving in direct sunlight.

Provide plants with sufficient spacing. Cucurbits need proper spacing to increase air circulation and to help prevent powdery mildew spores from spreading from one plant to the next (airborne).

Disinfect any tools after working around cucurbits. If you use a tool around summer squash, for instance, disinfect the tool before working around cucumbers. If the tool isn't disinfected properly the powdery mildew spores could be passed from one plant to the other. Disinfect tools with full strength vinegar or a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water.

Avoid watering cucurbits in the evening. Allowing the leaves to remain damp over night can increase the likelihood of powdery mildew. Water plants in the morning so the leaves have a chance to dry out before dusk. It is better to water the soil around the plants and avoid getting the leaves wet.

If leaves begin showing signs of powdery mildew (small white or gray spots on leaves) remove the infected leaves from the plant and discard in trash. It is not recommended to place infected leaves in a compost pile.

Homemade Sprays Containing Milk and Baking Soda

One of the simplest and most cost effective ways of preventing and controlling powdery mildew is using a spray of skim milk and baking soda, applied directly to the top and bottom sides of the plant leaves. The baking soda will increase the pH levels on the leaf surface which will make it difficult for the fungi spores to survive.