Azalea Gall: *Exobasidium vaccinii*

**Introduction**

Azalea gall is a problem of widespread occurrence in this country. Pale green, pink, white, or brown fleshy galls, caused by the fungus *Exobasidium vaccinii*, may develop on leaves (Fig. 1), branch tips, flower parts, and even on seedpods. *Exobasidium vaccinii* also infects species of *Vaccinium* including cranberries where it produces bright red, swollen spots on the leaves and fruits. Infected stems become thickened.

**Symptoms and Signs**

The fungus overwinters within the infected plant. In the late spring and early summer, a whitish coating appears on the swollen plant tissue (Fig. 2). This coating is composed of many microscopic fungal structures which produce spores capable of infecting more plants during moist weather. This disease is not usually a serious problem unless wet conditions prevail for long periods of time.

**Disease Cycle**

The disease develops on the leaves of azalea. The severity of symptoms varies depending on the weather conditions. Spores are produced on the leaves during the spring and summer. The spores are dispersed on air currents and splashed by rain drops on to healthy leaves where they can cause new infections. This normally occurs during cool, wet weather. The symptomatic galls are not visible until the following spring.

**Management Strategies**

To control this problem, the galls should be hand picked and destroyed before they turn white. Some fungicides are registered to help manage this problem in plantings in New York, but most are restricted-use fungicides and not curative. Removal of galls and/or applying fungicides as a preventative treatment is recommended, and for small plantings, hand removal...
of galls may still be the most viable option. For commercial applications in New York, please refer to the appropriate pest management guidelines.

Most native and horticultural azalea and rhododendron plants are susceptible. Some species and cultivars are more susceptible than others. *Rhododendron maxium* L., *R. catawbiense* Michx, and their hybrids, are listed as being particularly susceptible, as are the Indica azalea group. Susceptible plants growing in poorly aerated soils are more subject to infection by the fungus than those growing in well-aerated soils.

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