



Fruiting bodies of the false smut fungus, on the back side of the leaf, resemble miniature chimneys (inset).

False Smut Disease of Palms: Graphiola phoenicis

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Canary Island and date palms infected with disease resembling bug infestation! The false smut or graphiola leaf spot fungus has fruiting bodies, the bumpy hard things on the leaf, which resemble a scale insect or mealybug infestation. They exude powdery yellow spores on whitish filaments. This fungus is most evident on the older fronds and is not usually a concern, especially in the desert climate in which these palms are native, however, in the humid climate of southwest Florida this disease can take its toll on the *Phoenix* palm group. If abundant, the disease can shorten the life of fronds to only 3 years. Since fronds on date palms should be functional for 6 to 8 years, premature loss of fronds means less energy (carbohydrates) will be produced for the plant's survival. Other palm species are also known to be affected by this disease, but not as severely as the *Phoenix* (date) palm group.

Management: Remove only the severely infected fronds; those that have 30% or more of the surface area infected. It is not necessary to remove every frond that has a few bumps. Minimize conditions that favor disease development such as high humidity in the canopy from misdirected irrigation heads and shade and poor air flow may be improved by pruning nearby shade trees. Fungicides, such as propiconazole or thiophanate methyl may abate the disease, but applications should be conducted during the infection period, November through late March. Three to four applications, at three week intervals, may help. Ideally, applications should be started just before spore release, which can be detected as a yellow dust when the fronds are struck with a pole. Also, for updates check for new releases of the University of Florida Plant Disease Management Guide, Vol. 2: Ornamentals and Turf (1999-2000) fungicide recommendations in publication SP-52. Be sure to read the fungicide label for plant injury potential. Landscape use must also be on the label and study the mixing rates, as there may be several to choose from. Or call your local tree experts to do the work. Professionals have high-pressure spray equipment that will provide the thorough canopy coverage that is required.

Resistant Date Palms: Resistance to this disease has been noted with date palm cultivars: Kustaway, Barhee, Adbad, Rahman, Gizaz and Iteema.

For more information on home gardening, contact the Collier County Extension Service, Master Gardener Plant Clinic, at 353-2872. The Plant Clinic is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., and Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to noon, Main Library. E-mail dlcaldwell@mail.ifas.ufl.edu; call 353-4244.