

Fact Sheet

Myrtle Rust ... also known as guava rust and eucalyptus rust

Austropuccinia psidii

Myrtle rust is a serious fungal disease native to South America. It attacks plants of the Myrtaceae family (Myrtle family), a family that includes many New Zealand natives. It is found in many parts of the world and since 2010 has spread throughout eastern Australia.

In May 2017, it was detected for the first time on mainland New Zealand, and a biosecurity incursion response instigated in Kerikeri, Northland

Infected plants suffer die-back, and in severe cases, plants die. In Australia, some indigenous plant species are at risk of becoming extinct.

Host species & the threat

Many New Zealand natives are members of the Myrtaceae family; Pohutukawa and Rata (*Metrosideros*), Kanuka (*Kunzea*), Manuka (*Leptospermum*), Ramarama (*Lophomyrtus*), Rohutu (*Neomyrtus*), Swamp maire (*Syzygium*). 80% of Australia's native flora are members of the Myrtaceae family; many feature in New Zealand landscapes, as does Feijoa which is also susceptible.

Myrtle rust spores are highly mobile. Like many rusts, they are easily spread across large distances by wind – potentially across the Tasman Sea from Australia. They can also be transported by infected plant material, on clothing, equipment and vehicles, by insects and in rain splashes.

Climate modelling indicates the rust may readily establish and survive in low to mid-elevation areas around the North Island and possibly in coastal upper-South Island. While it may be difficult to eradicate, early detection gives us the best chance.

What to look out for

Myrtle rust attacks young, soft, actively growing leaves, shoots and young stems, and sometimes flowers and fruit. Initial symptoms are powdery, bright yellow or orange-yellow pustules on leaves, tips and stems. The developing lesions may cause a deformation of the leaves and shoots, and twig dieback if the infection is severe.

Infection of highly susceptible plants may result in plant death. Look out for:

- bright yellow powdery eruptions appearing on the underside of the leaf (young infection);
- bright yellow powdery eruptions on both sides of the leaf (mature infection);
- brown/grey rust pustules (older spores) can appear on older lesions;
- leaves may become buckled or twisted and die off.

Rusts of this type are rare on many native species - any sighting should raise suspicion.

If you think you have seen this fungus

Call MPI's Exotic Pests and Diseases hotline - 0800 80 99 66

Take a photo, and do not attempt to touch or collect samples as this may increase the spread of this disease.

Myrtle rust can be transported on clothing and equipment. If you think you've come into contact with myrtle rust spores in New Zealand or overseas, please wash your clothes and clean your equipment such as boots and tools thoroughly.



Pictures 2-4 above from B3 presentation by Suzy Perry, Biosecurity Queensland