

Black pod disease of cacao

Recognize the problem

The disease affects cacao pods at all stages and the young shoots of newly planted trees. The diseased young shoots may die. If the pods become diseased, a yellowish spot will appear, which leads to little brown spots. Within 7-10 days, the brownish spots extend and change to a darker black colour. Infected cushions (young pods) wilt and die. The beans of infected mature pods are destroyed and left with no economic value.

Background

Black pod disease is caused by a germ called a fungus. This germ grows on cacao trees in the shade when it is cool and damp. When the area is warmer and drier, the disease will not grow or spread quickly. The disease spreads from sick pods to healthy pods just like some diseases move from person to person in humans. When diseased pods are left on the trees or on the ground around the trees, the disease can spread to more cacao trees and pods.



Advanced black pod symptoms on cacao pods. (Photo by Louis Dreyfus Commodities)

Management

Manage the plantation to allow more light and air flow around the trees. This will help to reduce the humidity (damp) of the farm. When establishing new cacao trees plant in May/June, not later in the rainy season when there are more diseases. Use the recommended minimum planting distance of 3.1m x 3.1m to give 3,333 plants per hectare (ha).

Try to get about 50% shade in the canopy of the cacao trees. Reduce shade in the plantation by pruning or completely cutting down the shade trees. Avoid growing shade trees too close to the cacao trees.

Increase sunlight and air flow in the canopy area by pruning the cacao trees.

Brushing weeds on the ground in the plantation will also help to reduce the moisture around the trees.

Be sure to remove all cacao pods showing symptoms of disease. Take these out of the plantation and burn them or bury them.

Use recommended cacao varieties from MAFFS that are more resistant to black pod disease. These will not be affected as badly and will have healthier pods.

Scientific name ► *Phytophthora palmivora*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Sierra Leone, Ghana



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