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# Potato disorders: Common scab and powdery scab

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**T**wo distinctly separate diseases commonly known as “scab” can infect potatoes, significantly reducing tuber appearance and quality. The symptoms of these diseases have similarities, but there are important differences that affect management considerations. This publication will help distinguish between the two diseases and outline management strategies for each.

	Common scab	Powdery scab
<b>Causal organism(s)</b>	<p>Three species of bacteria cause common scab. Various common names—russet scab, pitted scab, and acid scab—describe the symptoms or conditions of infection.</p> <p><i>Streptomyces acidiscabies</i></p> <p><i>S. scabies</i></p> <p><i>S. turgidiscabies</i></p> <p>Because of their threadlike habit, these bacteria resemble fungi more than they do other bacteria.</p>	<p>Protozoan pathogen <i>Spongospora subterranea</i> f. sp. <i>subterranea</i></p> <p>Alternate hosts for powdery scab include other members of the nightshade family (Solanaceae) such as pepper, tomato, jimsonweed, and black nightshade.</p>
<b>Ideal conditions for infection</b>	<p>Young, rapidly growing potato tubers are most susceptible to infection. The primary route of infection is through young lenticels.</p> <p>Warm, dry soil conditions with soil temperatures above 72°F during tuber set and during rapid tuber development favor the disease.</p>	<p>The pathogen enters the epidermal cells of roots, root hairs, stolons, young shoots, and tubers, where further development occurs.</p> <p>Cool, moist conditions (52–65°F) and poorly drained soils favor infection.</p>
<b>Yield loss</b>	<p>Common scab does not normally affect total yield but often significantly affects tuber appearance, reducing marketable yield.</p> <p>When common scab produces deep-pitted lesions, the marketability for both fresh markets and processing (chips and fries) is greatly reduced because of increased peeling requirements and quality losses.</p> <p>Common scab does not normally lead to secondary rots while tubers are in storage.</p> <p>The scab pathogen can also infect table beet, carrot, parsnip, radish, turnip, and rutabaga crops, but it rarely has a significant economic impact on any of these crops.</p>	<p>Infection may reduce yield and infected tubers will continue to lose moisture in storage.</p> <p>Powdery scab lesions on tubers may serve as entry points for secondary tuber-rotting organisms. The powdery scab pathogen serves as a vector of the potato mop-top virus.</p>

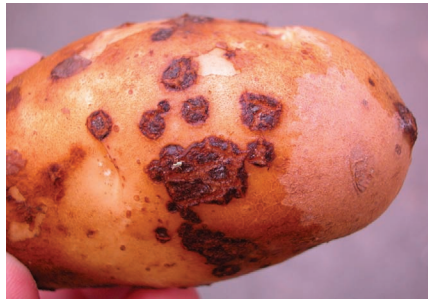
P O T A T O   D I S O R D E R S :   C O M M O N   S C A B   A N D   P O W D E R Y   S C A B

	Common scab	Powdery scab
<b>Symptoms and infection timing</b>	<p>Symptoms of common scab appear only on the tubers. Tubers are susceptible as soon as they begin to form. The severity of symptoms depends on a combination of the potato variety, the environment, and the aggressiveness of the infecting pathogen strain.</p> <p>The pathogen produces a phytotoxin that induces symptoms including cell swelling and cell death. Initially, symptoms appear as a browning and swelling of affected cells. Corky lesions typically have raised margins and slightly sunken centers. Individual lesions may spread to cover large portions of affected tubers.</p> <p><b>Russet scab</b>—At harvest, tubers may be covered with superficial tan to brown corky lesions.</p> <p><b>Pitted scab</b>—Tubers may have numerous depressions of varying diameter and depth beneath the surface.</p> <p><b>Acid scab</b>—Symptoms are similar to russet scab but occur at soil pH levels below 5.0.</p>	<p>Powdery scab affects potato tubers as well as roots, stolons, and young shoots before they break through the soil surface.</p> <p>Infection of tuber lenticels and eyes first appears as purplish-brown slightly sunken lesions. Tuber lesions begin to swell and, at maturity, the tuber periderm ruptures, releasing masses of powdery spore balls.</p> <p>Infection of roots leads to the development of milky white to tan galls up to 1 cm in diameter that eventually turn brown and release masses of powdery spore balls into the soil. Root galls may be confused with the symptoms caused by the root-knot nematode.</p>
<b>Longevity in soil</b>	<p>The pathogen can survive indefinitely in soil and can be an important production problem at soil pH 5.5 and above, although acid scab can cause symptoms in soils with pH levels below 5.0.</p>	<p>Powdery scab can survive as resting spores in the soil for up to 6 years.</p> <p>Under ideal conditions, multiple generations of infection and zoospore release can occur during a single growing season.</p>
<b>Disease spread</b>	<p>The common scab pathogen is both soil-borne and tuber-borne. It can be transported over long distances and introduced into new sites on infected seed pieces, equipment, and through human activity.</p>	<p>The pathogen is spread on seed tubers, and resting spores are moved to new sites in infested soil by equipment and human activity. The resting spores can also survive passage through animal digestive tracts.</p>

## Control

- To prevent both common and powdery scab, practice rotation with non-susceptible crops. A 3–4 year rotation is usually sufficient for common scab, but a rotation of at least 6 years is advised for management of powdery scab under Wisconsin conditions. It's important to avoid rotating with other root crops for control of common scab and to avoid using tomato in rotation with potato to control powdery scab.
- Control of weeds in the nightshade family is important for control of powdery scab.
- Grow scab-resistant varieties. Potato varieties vary in their reaction to these two pathogens. None are immune.
- Avoid planting potato seed pieces with symptoms of either common or powdery scab.
- Manage soil moisture through irrigation. Make sure the crop receives sufficient moisture during tuber initiation to prevent common scab, but be sure not to over-irrigate if powdery scab has been a problem in the past.
- To reduce the incidence of common scab, do not raise the pH level above 5.5 when liming the soil.
- Do not plant potatoes within two years of a manure application.
- If powdery scab–infected tubers are fed to livestock, do not use the resulting manure in potato fields because resting spores are not destroyed by their passage through the digestive tract.
- Cull infected potatoes at harvest and do not put culled potato debris back on land where potatoes will be planted in subsequent years.

**Superficial lesions of common scab on a red-skinned potato variety.**



**A close-up view of common scab symptoms on a potato tuber. Note the corky appearance of common scab lesions.**



**Symptoms of powdery scab on a red-skinned potato tuber. Note the slightly raised circular lesions and papery margins of lesions.**



**A close-up view of galls formed on potato roots, caused by the powdery scab pathogen.**



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