

POINSETTIA LATEX ERUPTION (I.E. CRUD)

If you've recently walked into your poinsettia house and found little pools of whiteish goop or residue sitting on your bracts, you've got a case of crud. The more technical term for this disorder is "latex eruption."



Most often, these blobs or puddles of latex-rich vascular fluid are found on the upper surface of bracts, along the midrib or larger veins. As it dries, it congeals and forms a crust that can look almost like a mealybug and almost always discolours the affected bract. Sooty mold also tends to grow on the residual vascular fluid, and it's virtually impossible to rinse off.

Why does this disorder occur? Well, our good friend turgor is the main culprit in the case of crud in poinsettias.

Excessive turgor pressure causes cell walls in bracts and leaves to burst, and then vascular fluid erupts out of the plant. This occurs most often when growing media is overly wet going into the night or when nighttime air temperature is high.

Salt accumulation in the growing media can also be a factor in incidences and severity of latex eruption. Since plants aren't growing rapidly at this point in the crop cycle but roots will still take up excess fertilizer salts in the media, additional salt uptake often forces roots to take up additional water to maintain osmotic balance. When excess moisture is present, this forced

uptake may cause turgor pressure to increase and either cause or increase the severity of latex eruptions in your crop.

Unfortunately, once latex eruption occurs, there is no way to undo the damage. Some varieties are more prone to this disorder than others, and incidences and severity of “crud” will vary from one operation to the next. Since moisture management and temperature are the primary drivers for this disorder, occurrences are typically more severe in hot spots throughout your greenhouses or areas with poorer air flow. As such, it’s best to focus on prevention:

- Allow moderate dry-down between waterings.
- Increase airflow and air exchanges (when possible) during the daytime to help drive transpiration and shorten the time that media is remains saturated.
- Avoid watering late in the day unless plants are dangerously dry and at risk of wilting.

If moderate to severe damage occurs, it’s wise to apply a foliar fungicide, as damaged tissue provides an easy entry point for pathogens like Botrytis.

And remember, if all else fails and bracts are damaged enough to make them unsalable as they are, you can always dress them up a bit with plant-safe spray dyes or glitter products rather than throw them away.

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