

NURSERY 'KNOW HOW':
#12 PITTOSPORUM
SUDDEN LEAF DROP

KNOW HOW
McHort
McPHERSON HORTICULTURE



NURSERY 'KNOW HOW' SERIES :#12 PITTOSPORUM

The sudden catastrophic leaf drop from established container grown pittosporum is not uncommon in mid-late Spring. The affected plants are rendered unsaleable and recovery, whilst possible is not economically viable.

The key areas of crop management that limit risk of Pittosporum leaf drop are:

Potting mix design.

Irrigation management.

Boosting beneficial biological soil organisms.

Scrupulous crop hygiene.

Adequate standing area drainage.

Careful crop handling.

Proactive chemical fungicide applications.

The following ***10 point plan works*** well and is currently employed by McHort clients throughout New Zealand.

1. Select a well aerated, free draining potting mix.

Aim for an AFP of 25-28 and a WHC of 50-55. Ensure standing areas for container production do not puddle. Stand plants on either weed mat or Metal, but never on bare dirt.

2. Choose a potting mix based on composted and aged pine bark, because it has far greater inherent disease suppression qualities than peat. Bark supports a more diverse range of beneficial organisms than peat appears to do.

3. Do not over fertilise your crop. Be especially careful with fast acting fertilisers in Autumn potting and late season top dress applications

Select products that are of mainly coated or encapsulated fertiliser types. These carry the lowest salinity threat. Avoid products which claim a very fast effect, or have only short longevity, unless you are prepared to re-apply these little and often. Do not heap top dress fertiliser up against the plant stem. Never allow the salinity (Ec) to build up in the potting mix. Monitor potting mix regularly with an Ec. meter using the 1:1.5 water extract method.

Maintain the Ec in the range 0.7—1.2.

Keeping the crop too dry can lead to high Ec. The relationship of fertiliser rate to diluting water volume in the root zone is a critical balance. Capillary irrigated crops should be leached through every two weeks in Summer with overhead irrigation.

4. Avoid damaging the root system of your stock when potting up, or potting off. Even bruising, especially at the base of the stem, can allow disease entry. Shifting mature plants that may have rooted through the bottom of the container may also cause damage

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5. Frequently fine tune your irrigation practice. Know exactly how much irrigation is being applied and do not overwater or apply more frequently than is necessary.

6. Provide shade on the sun-struck side of the growing container. Try a skirt of white polythene 'pot high' along the outer edge of each bed. Roots exposed to 35°C will be severely damaged, even killed.

7. Boost the beneficial fungi in your potting mix by adding Trichodry™ Nursery and following up monthly until March with Trichoflow™ Nursery. A regular and routine programme of re-application will be necessary to maintain a viable defense mechanism in the root zone. Control all pests that might cause injury to plant roots through which disease may then enter. Target Sciarid fly, Root mealy bug and Black Vine Weevil especially. Try Hypermites as a control of these pest. Call us for details of use.

8. Maintain scrupulous crop Hygiene. Inspect the root zone and stem base of your plants often. Rogue out and remove from the nursery any suspect plants immediately.

9. Avoid applying Top dress fertiliser too soon after any pruning operations. Aim to have an interval of 4 weeks between pruning and topdressing

10. Routinely spray foliar applications of Aliette® WG or Fostonic two weeks before any plant handling that may result in root disturbance or injury. Use an Aliette® WG drench as a spot treatment to clean up any disease hot spots. Maintain a monthly precautionary Aliette® WG or Fostonic foliar spray regime on all at risk plants. These chemicals stimulate the plant's own immune system, rather than eradicating pathogens.

If you need help managing these threats to your crop, call Donald today.

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