

IN AUSTRALIA

CERCOSPORA NEEDLE BLIGHT

Pseudocercospora pini-densiflorae

Description

Cercospora Needle Blight (CNB) is a conifer disease caused by a fungal pathogen *Pseudocercospora pini-densiflorae*. CNB was confirmed present in Queensland in 2021. Thought to be native to pine forests in eastern Asia and Central America. This tropical and subtropical pathogen affects the needle leaves of pine (*Pinus*) species globally. It can become a major obstacle to the production of pine seedlings, being particularly problematic at the later nursery stage.

Affected trees species

At least 46 pine (*Pinus*) species worldwide are known to be susceptible. *Pinus canariensis*, *P. contorta*, *P. halepensis*, *P. jeffreyi*, *P. lambertiana*, *P. muricata*, *P. nigra*, *P. pinaster*, *P. pinea*, *P. ponderosa*, *P. radiata* and *P. sylvestris* are all highly susceptible. Other conifer species such as *Abies*, *Cedrus*, *Larix*, *Picea* & *Pseudotsuga* may also be susceptible.

Symptoms

All tree ages can be affected but susceptibility is greatest at 1–2-years of age.

CNB first appears as pale-green spots or bands, which rapidly turn yellow and then brown, black. At late development, the dark bands are often broad (5+ mm), sometimes bordered by yellow halos.

CNB can cause pre-mature needle cast (shedding of leaves), slowed growth and nursery seedling mortality. Known for its ability to persist in infected plant material and debris. CNB remains viable in diseased needles on the ground even when dry. Re-moistened needles will rapidly produce spore and act as sources of further infection.



Credit: Emily Lancaster

Severe infection on *Pinus radiata*.



Credit: Michael Ramsden

Branch with low-level infection showing needles with distinctive black banding.

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Time most likely to be seen

It thrives during times where warm, humid conditions persist.



Pine needles with high-level infection showing distinctive black banding (top) and close-up (below).

Can be confused with

Early symptoms can mimic general discoloration and mottling associated with site drainage/nutrient interactions.

Symptoms can also be confused with those produced by other needle blight fungi, including such as *Dothistroma septosporum* (present in Australia) and *Lecanosticta acicola* (not present in Australia)."

Prevention and control

- Where possible source seeds from confirmed uninfested areas.
- Seeds sourced from infested areas should be free of needle debris before sowing.
- Quarantine any new plant material entering a nursery (i.e., withholding period).
- Removal and destruction of all diseased plant material in a nursery.
- Minimise water splash and increase between-plant spacing.
- Isolate susceptible older seedlings (i.e., >12 months old).
- If infestation is detected, use approved fungicides during periods optimal for development and spread.

Further information

- EFSA (European Food Safety Authority), Tramontini S, Gilioli G, Baldassarre F, Scala M, Haegi A, Valente MT, Sánchez B, Nougadère A and Vos S (2025) "Pseudocercospora pini-densiflorae – Pest Report to support the ranking of EU candidate priority pests. EFSA supporting publication 2025:EN-9401". 34 pp. <https://doi.org/10.2903/sp.efsa.2025.EN-9401>

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