

6. Diseases of Sugarcane

Red rot - *Colletotrichum falcatum* (Perfect stage: *Physalospora tucumanensis*)

Symptoms

The first external symptom appears mostly on third or fourth leaf which withers away at the tips along the margins. Typical symptoms of red rot are observed in the internodes of a stalk by splitting it longitudinally. These include the reddening of the internal tissues which are usually elongated at right angles to the long axis of the stalk. The presence of cross-wise white patches are the important diagnostic character of the disease. The diseased cane also emits acidic-sour smell. As the disease advances, the stalk becomes hollow and covered with white mycelial growth.



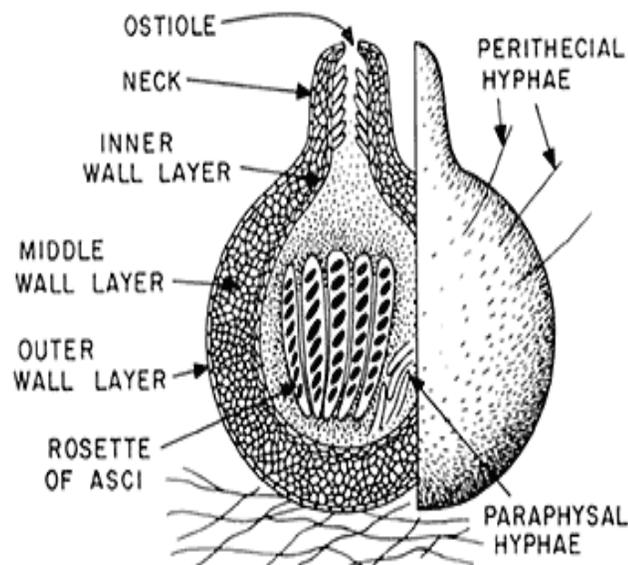
Symptoms

Later the rind shrinks longitudinally with minute black, velvety fruiting bodies protruding out of it. The pathogen also produces tiny reddish lesions on the upper surface of leaves with dark dots in the centre. The lesions are initially blood red with dark margins and later on with straw coloured centres. Often the infected leaves may break at the lesions and hang down, with large number of minute black dots.

Pathogen

The fungus produces thin, hyaline, septate, profusely branched hyphae containing oil droplets. The fungus produces black, minute velvety acervuli with long, rigid bristle-like, septate setae. [Conidiophores](#) are closely packed inside the acervulus, which are short, hyaline and single celled. The [conidia](#) are single celled, hyaline, falcate, [granular](#) and [guttulate](#). Fungus

also produces large number of globose and dark brown to black [perithecia](#) with a papillate [ostiole](#).



[Asci](#) are clavate, unitunicate and eight-spored. Large number of hyaline, septate, filiform paraphyses is also present among asci. [Ascospores](#) are ellipsoid or fusoid, hyaline, straight or slightly curved and unicellular which measure 18-22 μm x 7-8 μm .

Favourable Conditions

- Monoculturing of sugarcane.
- Successive ratoon cropping.
- Water logged conditions and injuries caused by insects.

Disease cycle

The fungus is sett-borne and also persists in the soil on the diseased clumps and stubbles as [chlamydospores](#) and dormant mycelium. The primary infection is mainly from infected setts. Secondary spread in the field is through irrigation water and cultivation tools. The rain splash, air currents and dew drops also help in the spread of conidia from the diseased to healthy plants in the field. The fungus also survives on collateral hosts [Sorghum vulgare](#), [S. halepense](#) and [Saccharum spontaneum](#). If the conidia settle on the leaves they may germinate and invade the leaves through various types of wounds. Stem infection may take place through insect bores and root primordia. The soil-borne fungus may also enter the healthy setts through cut-ends, and

cause early infection of the shoots. Though the perfect stage of the fungus has been observed in nature, the role of ascospores in the disease cycle is not understood.

Management

- Adopt crop rotation by including rice and green manure crops.
- Select the setts from the disease free fields or disease free areas.
- Avoid ratooning of the diseased crop.
- Soak the setts in 0.1% Carbendazim or Triademefon 0.05% solution for 15 minutes before planting.
- Grow resistant varieties CO 62198, CO 7704 and moderately resistant varieties CO 8001, CO8201.
- Setts can be treated with aerated steam at 52 °C for 4 to 5 hours and by moist hot air at 54°C for 2 hours.

Smut - [Ustilago scitaminea](#)

Symptoms

It is a culmiculous smut. The affected plants are stunted and the [central shoot is converted into a long whip-like](#), dusty black structure. The length of the whip varies from few inches to several feet. In early stages, this structure is covered by a thin, white papery membrane. The whip may be straight or slightly curved.

On maturity it ruptures and millions of tiny black smut spores ([teliospores](#)) are liberated and disseminated by the wind. Affected plants are usually thin, stiff and remain at acute angle. The whip like structure, representing the central shoot with its various leaves, may be produced by each one of the shoots/tillers arising from the clump.



Symptoms

The smutted clumps also produce mummified arrows in which lower portion consisted of a normal inflorescence with typical flowers and the upper portion of the rachis is converted into a typical smut whip. Occasionally smut sori may develop on the leaves and stem.

Pathogen

The fungal hyphae are primarily intercellular and collect as a dense mass between the vascular bundles of host cell and produce tiny black spores. The thin membrane which covers the smut whip represents the host epidermis. The smut spores are light brown in colour, spherical, echinulated and measuring 6.5- 8.5 μ m in diameter. Smut spores germinate to produce 3-4 celled, hyaline promycelium and produce 3-4 [sporidia](#) which are hyaline and oval shaped with pointed ends.

Favourable Conditions

- Monoculturing of sugarcane.
- Continuous ratooning and dry weather during tillering stage.

Disease cycle

[Teliospores](#) may survive in the soil for long periods, upto 10 years. The spores and [sporidia](#) are also present in the infected plant materials in the soil. The smut spores and dormant mycelium also present in or on the infected setts. The primary spread of the disease is through diseased seed-pieces (setts). In addition, sporidia and spores present in the soil also spread through rain and irrigation water and cause soil-borne infection. The secondary spread in the

field is mainly through the smut spores developed in the whips, aided by air currents. The fungus also survives on collateral hosts like [*Saccharum spontaneum*](#), [*S. robustum*](#), [*Sorghum vulgare*](#), [*Imperata arundinacea*](#) and [*Cyperus dilatatus*](#).

Management

- Plant healthy setts taken from disease free area.
- Remove and destroy the smutted clump (collect the whips in a thick cloth bag/polythene bag and immerse in boiling water for 1 hr to kill the spores).
- Discourage ratooning of the diseased crops having more than 10 per cent infection.
- Follow crop rotation with green manure crops or dry fallowing.
- Grow redgram as a companion crop between 2 rows of sugarcane.
- Grow resistant varieties like Co 7704 and moderately resistant varieties COC 85061 and COC 8201.

Sett rot or Pineapple disease - [*Ceratocystis paradoxa*](#)

[Symptoms](#)

The disease primarily affects the setts usually two to three weeks after planting. The fungus is soil-borne and enters through cut ends and proliferates rapidly in the parenchymatous tissues. The affected tissues first develop a reddish colour which turns to brownish black in the later stages. The severely affected setts show internodal cavities covered with the mycelium and abundant spores. A characteristic pineapple smell is associated with the rotting tissues. The setts may decay before the buds germinate or the shoots may die after reaching a height of about 6-12 inches. Infected shoots are stunted.



Symptoms

Pathogen

The fungus produces both macroconidia and microconidia. [Conidiophores](#) are linear, thin walled with short cells at the base and a long terminal cell. The microconidia are hyaline when young but become almost black at maturity. They are thinwalled, cylindrical and produced endogenously in chains in the long cells of conidiophores and pushed out in succession. Macroconidia are produced singly or in chains on a short, lateral conidiophores. Macroconidia are spherical or elliptical or [truncate](#) or [pyriform](#) and are hyaline to olive green or black measuring 16-19x10-12 μm .

The fungus also produces [chlamydoconidia](#) on short lateral hyphae in chains, which are oval, thick walled and brown in colour. The [perithecia](#) are flask shaped with a very long neck. The bulbous base of the perithecium is hyaline or pale yellow, 200-300 μm in diameter and ornamented with irregularly shaped, knobbed appendages. The ostiole is covered by numerous pale-brown, erect tapering hyphae. Asci are clavate and measures 25x10 μm and [ascospores](#) are single celled, hyaline, ellipsoid, more convex on one side, measures 7-10 x 2.5-4 μm .

Favourable Conditions

- Poorly drained fields.
- Heavy clay soils
- Temperature of 25-30° C
- Prolonged rainfall after planting.

Disease Cycle

The fungus survives as conidia and [chlamydoconidia](#) in the soil and in the infected, buried cane tissues. The inoculum moves from field to field through wind-borne conidia or irrigation or rain water. Inside the sett it spreads rapidly through the parenchymatous tissues and causes sett rot.

The insects like cane borer (*Diatraea dyari*) also helps in the spread of the disease. The pathogen also survives on coconut, cocoa, mango, papaya, coffee, maize and arecanut. Insects also play a part in the dissemination of the pathogen.

Management

- Soak the setts in 0.05% Carbendazim 15 minutes.
- Use long setts having 3 or 4 buds.
- Provide adequate drainage during rainy seasons.

Wilt - *Cephalosporium sacchari*

Symptoms

The first symptom of the disease is visible in the canes of 4-5 month age. The canes may wither in groups. The affected plants are stunted with yellowing and withering of crown leaves. The midribs of all leaves in a crown generally turn yellow, while the leaf lamina may remain green. The leaves dry up and stem develop hollowness in the core. The core shows the reddish discolouration with longitudinal red streaks passing from one internode to another. In severe cases, spindle shaped cavities tapering towards the nodes develop in each internode. The canes emit a disagreeable odour, with lot of mycelial threads of the fungus cover the cavity.

Pathogen

The fungal mycelium is hyaline, septate and thin walled. The conidiophores are simple or branched and produce single celled, hyaline, oval to elliptical microconidia.

Favourable Conditions

- High day temperature (30-35°C).
- Low humidity (50-60%).
- Low soil moisture and alkaline soils.
- Excess doses of nitrogenous fertilizers.

Disease Cycle

The fungus is soil-borne and remains in the soil as saprophyte for 2-3 years. The disease is primarily transmitted through infected seed pieces. The secondary spread is aided by wind, rain and irrigation water.

Management

- Select the seed material from the disease-free plots.
- Avoid the practice of ratooning in diseased fields.
- Burn the trashes and stubbles in the field.
- Grow coriander or mustard as a companion crop in the early stages of crop.
- Dip the setts in 40ppm Boran or Manganese for 10 minutes or in 0.25% Emisan or 0.05% Carbendazim for 15 minutes.

Rust - *Puccinia erianthi* (Syn: *P. melanocephala* and *P. kuehnii*)

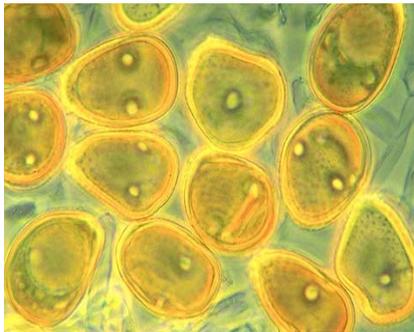
Symptoms

Minute, elongated, yellow spots (uredia), usually 2-10 x 1-3 mm appear on both the surfaces of young leaves. The pustules turn to brown on maturity. Late in the season, dark brown to black telia appear on the lower surface of leaves. In severe cases, the uredia also appear on the leaf sheath and the entire foliage looks brownish from a distance.



Pathogen

The mycelium is hyaline, branched and septate. *P.kuehnii* produces ovoid or pear shaped, single celled uredospores measuring 29-57 x 8-37µm with apical thickening and golden yellow in colour. Teliospores are produced in scanty which are yellow in colour, club shaped, two celled, smooth walled and measuring 24- 34 X 18-25µm single celled, dark yellow coloured with 4 equatorial pores.



abundance,

smooth walled and slight **Uredospores** septum. Occurrence of pycnial and aecial stages and the role of alternate host are unknown.

Teliospores are produced in which are pale to brick colour, two celled,

Favourable Conditions

- Temperature of 30°C.
- Humidity between 70 and 90 per cent.
- High wind velocity and continuous cloudiness.

Disease Cycle

The fungus survives on collateral hosts like *Erianthus fulvus* and *Saccharum spontaneum*. The uredospores also survive in the infected stubbles in the soil. The disease is mainly spread through air-borne uredospores.

Management

- Remove the collateral hosts.
- Spray [Tridemorph](#) 1 kg or Mancozeb 2 kg/ha.

Gummosis - [Xanthomonas axonopodis pv. vasculorum](#)

Symptoms

The [bacterium](#) produces two distinct types of symptoms. On the mature leaves, longitudinal stripes or streaks, 3-7mm in width and several cm in length, appear around the affected veins, near the tip. Initially these stripes are pale yellow in colour, later turn to brown. The affected tissues slowly dry up.

The infected canes are stunted with short internodes, giving a bushy appearance. When such canes are cut transversely or split open longitudinally, a dull yellow bacterial ooze comes out from the cut ends and bacterial pockets are seen inside the slitted cane. The fibro vascular bundles are deep red and internodal cavities formed in the severe cases are filled with yellow coloured bacterial gums.

Pathogen

The bacterium is a short rod, Gram negative, non spore forming measuring 1.0 to 1.5µm X 0.4 to 0.5µm, with a single polar flagellum. It is [facultative anaerobe](#) and it produces yellow slimy growth.

Disease Cycle

The bacterium remains viable in the soil as well as in infected canes. The primary transmission is through naturally affected diseased setts or through soil-borne contamination. The secondary spread may be through wind splashed rain, harvesting implements, animals and insects. The bacterium can survive in the insect's body for a long time and in this way may be transmitted long distances. On entry into the host the bacterium reaches the vascular tissues and becomes systemic. The bacterium also perpetuates on maize, sorghum, pearl millet and other weed hosts, which also serve as sources of inoculum.

Management

- Remove and burn the affected clumps and the stubbles in the field. Select setts from disease free areas.

- Avoid growing collateral hosts like maize, sorghum and pearl millet near the sugarcane fields.

Red stripe - *Pseudomonas rubrilineans*

Symptoms

The disease first makes its appearance on the basal part of the young leaves. The stripes appear as water soaked, long, narrow chlorotic streaks and become reddish brown in few days. These stripes are 0.5 to 1 mm in width and 5-100 mm in length, run parallel to the midrib. The stripes remain confined to lower half of the leaf lamina and whitish flakes spread to growing points of the shoot and yellowish stripes develop, which later turn reddish brown. The rotting may commence from the tip of the shoot and spreads downwards. The core is discoloured to reddish brown and shrivelled and forms a cavity in the centre. In badly affected fields, a foul and nauseating smell appears.



Symptoms

Pathogen

The bacterium is a short rod (0.7 X 1.67 μ m), gram negative, non capsulate with a polar [flagellum](#).

Favourable Conditions

- Continuous ratooning and prolonged rainy weather with low temperature (25⁰ C)

Disease cycle

The pathogen remains viable in the soil and infected plant residues. The bacterium also survives on sorghum, pearl millet, maize, finger millet and other species of *Saccharum*. The bacterium primarily spreads through infected canes. The secondary spread is mainly through rainsplash, irrigation water and insects. Infected parenchymatous cells may collapse and normal functioning of the plant parts may fail. Several grasses, including ragi and bajra, have been reported to be infected by the bacteria and these hosts may also play a role in the perpetuation and spread of the pathogen.

Management

- Whenever the disease is noticed; the affected plants should be removed and burnt.
- Growing resistant varieties Select setts from the healthy fields.
- Avoid growing collateral hosts near the sugarcane fields.

Sugarcane Mosaic - [Sugarcane mosaic potyvirus](#)

Symptoms

The disease appears more prominently on the basal portion of the younger foliage as [chlorotic](#) or yellowish stripes alternate with normal green portion of the leaf. As infection becomes severe, yellow stripes appear on the leaf sheath and stalks. Elongated necrotic lesions are produced on the stalks and stem splitting occurs. The necrotic lesions also develop on the internodes and the entire plant becomes stunted and chlorotic.



Symptoms

Pathogen

Sugarcane mosaic [potyvirus](#) is a flexuous rod, 650-770nm long X 12-15nm with [ss RNA](#) genome.

Disease cycle

The virus is mainly transmitted through infected canes used as seed. The virus also infects *Zea mays* and a number of other cereals (*Sorghum vulgare*, *Pennisetum americanum*, *Eleusine indica*, *Setaria lutescens*, *Echinochloa crusgalli*, *Stenotaphrum secundatum*, *Digitaria didactyla*) which serve as potential sources of virus inoculum. The virus also spreads through viruliferous aphids viz., *Melanaphis sacchari*, *Rhopalosiphum maidis* in a non-persistent manner. The virus is also sap-transmissible. The incubation period varies from 7 to 20 days, depending upon the host variety and virus strain. The symptoms may be prominent or masked depending on the environmental conditions and variety.

Management

- Roguing of infected plants and use of disease free planting material.
- Chemical sprays to manage the insect vector population in early crop stage.
- Grow mosaic-resistant or, at least, tolerant varieties.
- Breeding mosaic-resistant varieties is needed.
- *Saccharum spontaneum* L. and *S. barberi* (Jesweit) carry resistance to mosaic and so varieties with this background must be preferred.
- Rogue out the diseased clumps periodically. Select setts from the healthy fields as the virus is sett-borne. Aerated Steam Therapy (AST) at 56°C for 3 hrs, for setts before planting is advised.

Grassy shoot - *Phytoplasma*

Symptoms

The disease appears nearly two months after planting. The disease is characterised by the production of numerous lanky tillers from the base of the affected shoots. Leaves become pale yellow to completely chlorotic, thin and narrow. The plants appear bushy and 'grass-like' due to reduction in the length of internodes premature and continuous tillering. The affected clumps are stunted with premature proliferation of axillary buds. Cane formation rarely occurs in the affected clumps, if formed, thin with shorter internodes having aerial roots at the lower nodes. The buds on such canes usually papery and abnormally elongated.

Pathogen

The disease is caused by a [phytoplasma](#). Two types of bodies are seen in ultrathin sections of phloem cells of infected plants. The spherical bodies of 300-400 nm diameter and [filamentous](#) bodies of 30-53 nm diameter in size.

Disease cycle

The primary spread of the phytoplasma is through diseased setts and cutting knives. The pathogen is transmitted secondarily by aphids viz., [Rhopalosiphum maydis](#), [Melanaphis sacchari](#) and [M. idiosacchari](#). Sorghum and maize serves as natural collateral hosts.

Management

- Eradication of diseased parts as soon as symptoms are seen.
- Avoid selection of setts from diseased area.
- Pre-treating the healthy setts with hot water at 52°C for 1 hour before planting
- Treating them with hot air at 54°C for 8 hours.
- Spraying the crop twice a month with insecticides.

Ratoon stunting - [Clavibacter xyli sub sp. xyli](#) (Rickettsia Like Organism - RLO)

Symptoms

Diseased clumps usually display stunted growth, reduced tillering, thin stalks with shortened internodes and yellowish foliage. Orange-red vascular bundles in shades of yellow at the nodes are seen in the infected canes.



Symptoms

Pathogen

The pathogen ([Clavibacter xyli sub sp. xyli](#)) is a RLO known to be present in the xylem cells of infected plants. They are small, thin, rod shaped or [coryneform](#) (0.15 to 0.32µm wide and 1.0-2.7µm long) and Gram positive.

Disease cycle

The primary spread is through the use of diseased setts. The disease also spreads through harvesting implements contaminated with the juice of the diseased canes. Maize, sorghum, [Sudan grass](#) and [Cynodon](#) serves as [collateral hosts](#) for the pathogen.

Management

- Select the setts from disease free fields or from disease free commercial nursery.
- Remove and burn the clumps showing the disease incidence.
- Treat the setts before planting, as specified for grassy shoot disease.

Minor diseases

Damping-off - [Pythium aphanidermatum](#), [P. debaryanum](#), [P. graminicola](#), [P.ultimum](#)

Germinating seeds and young seedlings are attacked and killed in [pre-emergence](#) phase and seedlings show water soaked lesions at collar region, leading to withering and drying in post emergence stage.

Downy mildew - [Peronosclerospora sacchari](#)

Downy fungal growth with yellow stripes on upper surface, shredding of older leaves, rapid elongation of internodes of affected canes.

Eye spot - [Helminthosporium sacchari](#)

The water soaked spot develops on leaves, later elongated and turns to form “eye” shaped spot with reddish brown centre surrounded by straw yellow tissues.

Ring spot –[Leptosphaeria sacchari](#)

The water soaked spots appear on leaves and turns to straw colour later surrounded by a thin reddish brown band and a diffused discolouration zone.

Leaf scald - [Xanthomonas albilineans](#)

Whitish lines appear on the leaves, run to the full length of leaves and sheaths. Later leaves wither and dry from tip down-wards, gives a scald appearance to the clump. Sprouting of lateral buds of the matured canes occurs in acropetal fashion.

White leaf - *Phytoplasma*

Sugarcane white leaf is of minor importance and is caused by phytoplasma. The plants exhibit pure white leaves, stripped leaves and mottled leaves. Its vector is *Matsumuratettix hiroglyphicus*.