

Monsoon-associated pests and diseases in spices and management

Monsoon season provides an ideal environment for spice farming. Though beneficial for crop growth, it also provides a conducive weather for the spread of various pests and diseases in spices which might assume severe proportions, if adequate management measures are delayed or not adopted timely as per recommendations prescribed for each crop. After a harsh summer, the spell of south west monsoon is gathering strength across several spice growing tracts. Considering the situation, it is advised to adopt the recommended management measures in a time bound manner, besides keeping a constant vigil on pest and disease development under field conditions. Monsoon-associated pests and diseases are considered as a threat to major spices including black pepper, cardamom, ginger, turmeric and nutmeg. The ambient temperature, moisture and atmospheric humidity existing during monsoon plays a vital role in the outbreak of several pests and diseases that are primarily spread through planting material, soil, water, wind and agricultural implements.

Phytophthora induced diseases are wide spread and devastating during monsoon in spices like black pepper (foot rot), cardamom (Azhukal/capsule rot) and nutmeg (leaf fall/fruit rot). As a part of phytosanitary measures, dead/severely affected plants and plant parts should be removed from the field and destroyed. Provisions should be made to prevent water stagnation by providing adequate drainage facilities. In endemic areas where diseases exhibits a recurring pattern, to protect leaves as well as fruits, prophylactic sprays with Bordeaux mixture (1%) shall be undertaken during May - June and August - September. Further, based on recommendations, metalaxyl - mancozeb (0.125%) or potassium phosphonate (0.3%) may be used as an alternative. In order to prevent disease spread through soil in black pepper and ginger, basin of the vines (black pepper) and beds (ginger) should be drenched with copper oxychloride (0.2%) or metalaxyl - mancozeb (0.125%).

Rhizome and soft rots are the major diseases caused by *Pythium* in spices like cardamom and ginger/turmeric, respectively. Since water stagnation aggravates the diseases, care should be taken to provide adequate drainage. Uproot and destroy disease affected plants besides drenching the beds with mancozeb (0.3%). To manage the rot diseases, based on the recommendations in respective crops, copper oxychloride (0.2%) or metalaxyl - mancozeb (0.125%) or potassium phosphonate (0.3%) may be used during the months of May - June and August - September.

Bacterial wilt is a serious problem in ginger cultivation. Before adopting management measures the disease should be confirmed by performing 'ooze test'. After confirmation, diseased plants should be uprooted and destroyed and drench the beds with copper oxychloride (0.2%) to prevent further spread.

Spike shedding/anthracnose of black pepper, which is of common occurrence under misty conditions in high altitude regions, can be managed with aerial sprays of Bordeaux mixture (1%) or carbendazim - mancozeb (0.1%).

Shoot borer infesting ginger and turmeric and pollu beetle attack in black pepper can be noticed from the middle of July. Pest management solutions to control these pests may be initiated from the second fortnight of July to contain the populations below the economic threshold levels.