Building Block Plant Diseases

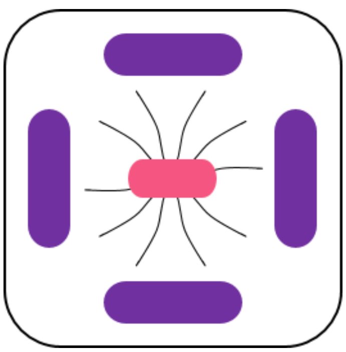
Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Bacterial Soft Rot

Brian Hudelson, UW-Madison Plant Pathology

Potatoes are a very important crop in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is the third largest producer of potatoes in the US (after Idaho and Washington). In 2023, Wisconsin-grown potatoes were worth $400 million.

Potato plants can suffer from many kinds of diseases. My vote for most disgusting is bacterial soft rot. Soft rot causes tubers (the part of the potato plant that we eat) to turn into a goopy, slimy, smelly mess. Eww!



Several rod-shaped bacteria cause soft rot. Bacteria are super small, and you will need to use a microscope if you want to see them. Some bacteria have tail-like structures called flagella that help them move and infect plants.

Watch for soft rot in wet years. Tubers without enough calcium also rot more often. If you wound tubers when you dig them up, they are more likely to rot. Be sure to keep tubers dry after digging them up to prevent soft rot.

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