

**Question: Could you discuss a little bit about gray mold? There seems to be a lot of it around this year even though it has been pretty dry since the end of April.**

Gray mold is caused by the fungus *Botrytis cinerea* and is a very common pathogen of strawberry and caneberry fruit in the Pajaro Valley. There are a few important points to address regarding this disease for both commercial growers and home gardeners.

Briefly, gray mold caused by *Botrytis* generally appears as the fruit is ripening, although if the conditions are right it will appear on any stage including the flower. Affected areas are initially spots of light brown on the fruit which are yet firm and not leaking. These light brown areas then over the course of a few days will turn to the gray, velvety growth for what this disease is named and known.

One of the most important points about gray mold is that in many situations it infects the flower and lies dormant until the fruit reaches a certain soluble solid content, also known as Brix. Thus one can see a significant delay between the time that the fruit (in the form of a flower) was actually infected and the appearance of the pathogen itself as a velvety blanket of gray. This explains what you are describing above in your question, in that the flowers quite likely were exposed to wet weather several weeks ago and subsequently infected with the fungus which is just now becoming apparent, even though the weather right now is dry and not really the conditions you would expect are good for this disease.

The weather conditions of the California Central coast make this area a haven for *Botrytis* which thrives in cool temperature and lots of moisture thanks to all the fog. While infection of the flower is favored as described above, even fruit which is wet for longer than two hours can be invaded directly by the fungus. It is not unknown for the fungus to become active on the very soft and nitrogen rich branch tips of caneberries and actually cause some dieback of the growing lateral.

Although the conditions here very much favor *Botrytis* gray mold, there is a lot local berry growers can do to limit the amount of disease they have. Maintaining the field clear of infected fruit, not planting too close together, and reducing free moisture on the flowers and fruit by proper irrigation and covering the crop with macro-tunnels are all steps which will make great strides in reducing the amount of *Botrytis* gray mold in the field.

The above has been a discussion of *Botrytis* disease in strawberries and caneberries in the Monterey Bay area of California. Please contact Mark Bolda at UCCE Santa Cruz if you have more questions on this topic or any other topics concerning blackberry, raspberry or strawberry production.