Black root rot disease commonly damages second and third year strawberry plantings in Kentucky. Black root rot is a general name for several root problems that produce similar symptoms. One problem may act alone or in combination with other factors.

Symptoms
Affected plants may be scattered throughout a strawberry planting or grouped in one or more parts of it. Plants with black root rot are less vigorous than normal plants and produce fewer runners. Individual or groups of leaves may wilt, discolor and die. Entire plants may die when black root rot is severe. Affected plants should be carefully dug up (not pulled) and their root systems examined. Plants with black root rot will exhibit one or more of the following root symptoms:

- Root system smaller than in normal plants.
- Main root with lesions that are darker than the rest of the root.
- Feeder roots are lacking.
- Feeder roots with dark zones or lesions.
- All or part (usually the tip) of main roots killed. A cross-section of a dead root shows it is blackened throughout.

Causes
One or more of the following factors may be involved in black root rot problems: soil fungi (e.g., Fusarium, Rhizoctonia, Pythium)
nematodes (microscopic round worms), winter injury, fertilizer burn, drought, excess salts, herbicide injury, wet soils, or pH imbalance. In some cases, environmental factors may predispose plants to attack by the root rotting fungi.

Disease Management
There are no cures or guaranteed controls for black root rot. Control measures center around proper planting and care of strawberry plants.

A fact sheet entitled “Strawberry Production in Kentucky” (HO-16) provides useful information on proper strawberry cultivation and is available through your county extension office.

1. Use only healthy, white-rooted strawberries when planting.
2. Plant in well-drained soils.
3. Maintain plant vigor with adequate fertilization and cultivation.
4. Irrigate strawberries during dry periods.
5. Fumigation may be practical for commercial plantings. It is not recommended for home plantings.

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