



First report of *Botrytis cinerea* on leaves of some old rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboreum*) plants grown in Northern Italy

Angelo Garibaldi¹ · Incoronata Luongo^{1,2} · Domenico Bertetti¹ · Ilaria Martino¹ · Paolo Valfrè¹ · Maria Lodovica Gullino¹

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During June 2023, the basal leaves of some old plants of *Rhododendron arboreum* hybrids grown in a private garden located in Campiglia Cervo (Biella province, northern Italy) showed well defined, irregular, brown, necrotic spots. With high environmental humidity, a soft rot spread on the affected tissues. The isolations were carried out on potato, dextrose, agar (PDA), within 10 days, at 25 °C ± 1. The fungal colonies obtained from isolations were soft, gray, and produced branched conidiophores with unicellular, elliptical to ovoid conidia that measured 8.7–12.6 × 6.3–9.9 (mean: 10.6 × 8.4) µm. These morphological characteristics are typical of *Botrytis cinerea* (Ellis 1971). The DNA of the representative isolate DB23-07-01 was extracted. The G3PDH, HSP60 and RPB2 regions were examined (Staats et al. 2005) obtaining three sequences (GenBank submission ID numbers: 2,809,834, 2,809,879, 2,809,882, respectively) whose BLASTn search showed 100%, 99% and 99%, respectively, identity with *B. cinerea*. In the pathogenicity test, a suspension of the isolate DB23-07-01 was applied on leaves belonging to three basal branches of old arboreal plants of *R. arboreum* hybrids. Inoculated branches were maintained in moistened bags for 10 days. Three branches of the control plants were treated with sterile water and kept in the same conditions. The first symptoms of infection appeared on inoculated leaves, about 14 days after the

inoculation and *B. cinerea* was reisolated from symptomatic tissues with the same method described above. Control branches remained symptomless. *B. cinerea* is reported on a large number of hosts, among which also the genus *Rhododendron* (Coyier and Roane 2001). This is the first report of *B. cinerea* on *R. arboreum* hybrids in Italy. The control of *B. cinerea* on *Rhododendron* could become a serious problem for the production of rooted cuttings, increasing the costs in the production sector of this genus.

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✉ Domenico Bertetti
domenico.bertetti@unito.it

¹ Interdepartmental Centre for the Innovation in the Agro-Environmental Sector (AGROINNOVA), University of Torino, 10095 Grugliasco, Italy

² Department of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (DISAFA), University of Torino, 10095 Grugliasco, TO, Italy