

## A new record of horse hair blight on nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt.) from India

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### Abstract

A new record of horse hair blight disease caused by *Marasmius equicrinis* on nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) observed at Rayamangalam Panchayat of Ernakulam District in Kerala, India, is reported. The formation of mycelial hairs on the plant caused drying of leaves and branches getting themselves hung on the mycelial network giving a 'bird's nest' appearance.

**Key words :** horse hair blight, *Marasmius equicrinis*, *Myristica fragrans*, nutmeg.

Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt.) (Myristicaceae) is one of the major tree spice crops of Kerala cultivated mostly in homesteads. Recently a new thread blight disease of nutmeg was noticed in some homesteads in Airapuram area of Rayamangalam Panchayat of Ernakulam District (Kerala, India).

The disease was noticed mainly on older trees whose branches were tangled with dark brown to black, long and hair-like growth of fungal mycelium. The mycelial strands penetrate into the branches and get themselves attached to the surface. These mycelial strands extend to the leaf surface along the petiole and then branches as white mycelial threads. As a result of infection, the leaves dry up; the drying of leaves starts from the middle of the petiole and in a few days the entire leaf dries up. The dried leaves get detached from the branches leaving a portion of the petiole on the branch and remain suspended on the mycelial strands. Eventually, all the leaves get detached from the branch and the branch itself dries up. In severe cases, the ramifications by the network of mycelial strands give the appearance of a 'bird's nest' made up of dried leaves and twigs (Fig. 1). The fungus was identified as *Marasmius equicrinis* Muell.

Horse hair blight in nutmeg caused by *M. equicrinis* has not been reported from elsewhere in



Fig. 1. Horse hair blight of nutmeg

India. However, horse hair blight on cocoa (*Theobroma cacao* L.) and garcinia (*Garcinia cambogia* (Gaertn.) Desr.) have been reported in Kerala by Abraham *et al.* (1991) and Abraham & George (1997), respectively. The symptoms of damage, mycelial ramifications and the mycelial colour observed in hair blight in nutmeg are the same as that reported on cocoa and garcinia. Tunstall (1925) recorded the occurrence of the disease on tea from Cachar, India.

Horse hair blight on nutmeg can be controlled by prompt cutting and burning of affected parts and spraying of 1% Bordeaux mixture.

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