

SJM
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Flowers

Agricultural crews begin fungus hunt

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Agricultural detectives once again are trying to track down chrysanthemum white rust, the devastating fungus that has threatened mum crops in Santa Cruz County.

The annual inspection of mums, which in recent years has turned up as many as 122 cases of infection at local homes, gets under way today. Attention this year will be focused on residential neighborhoods in Soquel and Watsonville, where the fungus has been spotted during previous inspections.

Inspection crews also will be checking plants in La Selva Beach and Capitola, according to county Agricultural Commissioner Dave Moeller.

The disease appears, he said, as white or yellowish pustules on the undersides of chrysanthemum leaves.

The annual program mandates destruction of diseased plants and the spraying of fungus-free commercial plants with a fungicide to protect the flower crops.

The county, Moeller noted, is under a state quarantine that restricts the movement of chrysanthemums in and out of the county and requires certain inspection and eradication measures.

Moeller said homeowners who suspect they have infected mums should not handle the plants but instead should call his Watsonville office at (408) 763-8080 for information on what to do.