

Control smut disease in Napier Grass

A serious disease of Napier grass, caused by a smut fungus, has been reported in the Central Kenya highlands.



Smut disease is found in the higher areas of Kiambu, Thika, Othaya and Kirinyaga Districts. It is spread by wind and infected planting material.

The signs of infection by smut disease are:

- Infected plants flower early
- The flower head is a mass of black spores
- The stems are smaller and produce much less leaf than healthy plants

The disease spreads rapidly. Farmers whose Napier grass has been infected can lose up to 1/3 of the crop to the disease (5 to 6 t of dry matter from 1 acre of Napier in a year). Some farmers have had to sell their cattle because they did not control the disease.

HOW TO CONTROL THE DISEASE

1. Inspect your crop regularly and remove the diseased parts of plants. Burn the diseased materials. Do not feed them to cattle because the disease might be returned to the farm in the manure.



Diseased plants are usually smaller

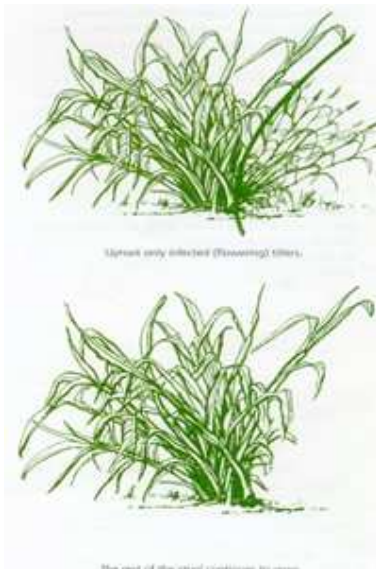
Look for stems like this one

2. obtain planting material from areas free from the disease. Select healthy-looking plants that do not have black flowers. Avoid plants whose stems look thinner than normal.

3. Improve the health of the Napier grass by applying manure or fertilizer. Use 1 heaped shovel of dry manure per stool twice a year, or 2 bags of NPK 20:1 0:1 0 per acre every year. Apply 1 bag in the middle of the long rains and 1 bag at the beginning of the short rains.

4. Weed your grass after every harvest.

5. Plant Napier grass like Kakamega 1 that resists the smut disease. Ask your extension officer about alternative fodder crops, such as Guatemala grass, Giant Panicum or Giant Setaria.



The rest of the stool continues to grow

Compiled by Dr FN Lusweti
KARI Headquarters Library
resource.center@kari.org
KARI/MUGUGA PO BOX 30148 NAIROBI