UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Tar Spot of Corn

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September 2025

Pest Background

- Tar spot is caused by the fungal pathogen *Phyllachora maydis*.
- Under favorable conditions for disease, yield loss on susceptible hybrids can be severe.
- Tar spot was first identified in DE at the end of 2023 and has been identified in all three countries for the 2025 season (Fig 1)

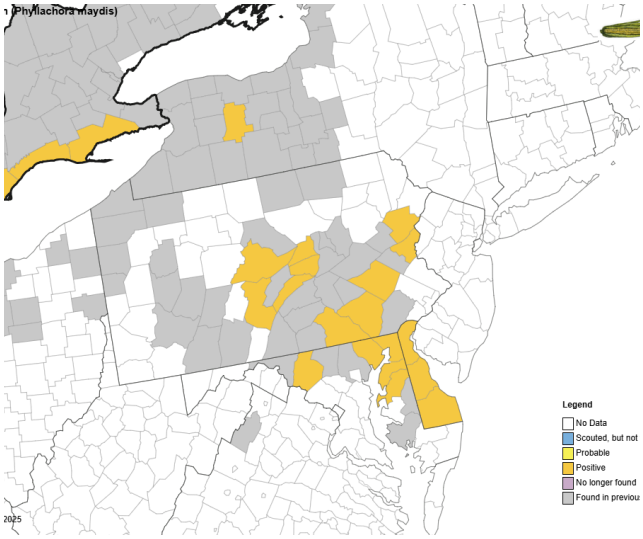

Fig 1: Tar Spot Distribution as of Aug. 2025
https://corn.ipmpipe.org/tarspot/

Identification

- Symptoms include small, black specks (stroma) on the upper and lower surface of corn leaves (Fig 2).
- Mature common and southern rust pustules that transition from orange-red spores to production of black teliospores can be mistaken for tar spot.
- Rust spores or insect frass/poop can be scraped away with a fingernail, but tar spots cannot be scraped off the leaf (Fig 3).
- Tar spots can also form on leaf sheaths, husks, and tassels.

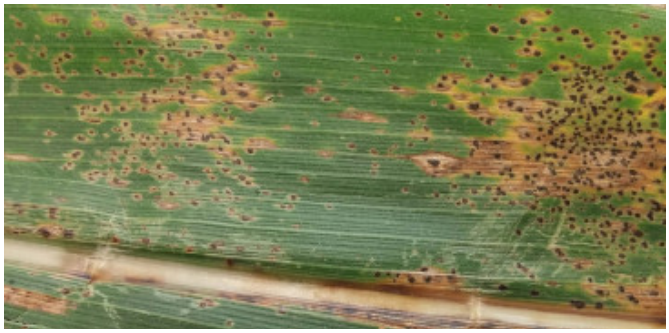

Fig 2: Tar spot on a corn leaf

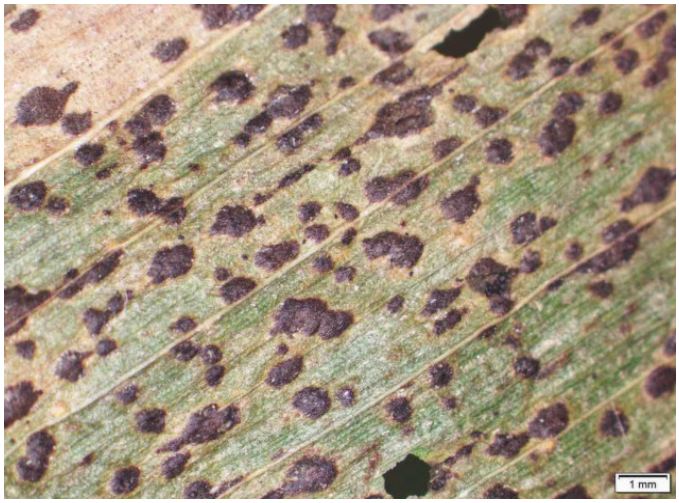

Fig 3: Fungal structures of tar spot on a corn leaf

Management

- Corn is the only known host for *Phyllachora maydis*. There are diseases caused by different pathogens that go by the same common name, particularly in ornamentals.
- The pathogen will overwinter in corn residue.
- High relative humidity and prolonged leaf

wetness favor disease. Epidemics that start earlier in the season result in greater chance for yield loss.

- Many fungicides are now labeled for tar spot, and the best economic return has been shown on a single application made between VT-R3.

References

Crop Protection Network (2022, Jan 24). Tar Spot of Corn. Retrieved from: https://cropprotectionnetwork.org/encyclopedia/tar-spot-of-corn