

Loose Smut Of Wheat Found In Illinois



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Wheat heads affected by loose smut, caused by the fungus *Ustilago tritici*, have been seen sporadically in southern and central Illinois. Loose smut of wheat is observed as masses of black spores in place of the glumes and kernels on the head. The fungus survives on the embryo of wheat seeds and grows inside the plant after seed germination. Spores from affected heads

can be blown onto nonaffected heads and cause infection during wheat flowering.

No "in-season" control exists for loose smut, as foliar fungicides are not effective in controlling it. Control occurs before planting. Varieties with good resistance are available, but the best way to control loose smut is to plant disease-free seed. If loose smut is observed in your field, do not keep the seed for planting. Some systemic seed treatments can help control loose smut as well, but it is always best to start with disease-free seed. Δ

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Wheat head affected by loose smut.