

Elliottia racemosa— an Azalea Companion Plant

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Last fall, I bought a small specimen of *Elliottia racemosa* or Georgia plume. At the time, someone commented that it was a small deciduous tree, but I basically knew nothing about it, the foliage looked attractive, and it was going to be a grand experiment. After I got home, a few minutes on the Internet revealed that it is ericaceous, was thought to be extinct, but is now listed as a threatened species.

This native of the Georgia coastal plain derives its name from the foot long, plume-like spikes of fragrant white flowers that are produced in the early summer. The leaves are native azalea-like and reportedly turn red in the fall — a feature that escaped me last fall. The literature noted that it had been successfully grown in Zone 6, so I concluded that I had a chance in my Bethesda, Maryland (Zone 7) garden. During the winter, the small specimen of Georgia plume was subjected to 3° F with no obvious problem, as it leafed out as expected. That's the good news.

The bad news: I observed lesions on the leaves, took photographs, and submitted a specimen to the University of Maryland for examination. Dr. Karen Rane, the head of the plant pathology laboratory at the University of Maryland, found nothing infectious and characterized the condition as abiotic. In other words, there was no evidence of a bug, fungus, virus, or bacterium.

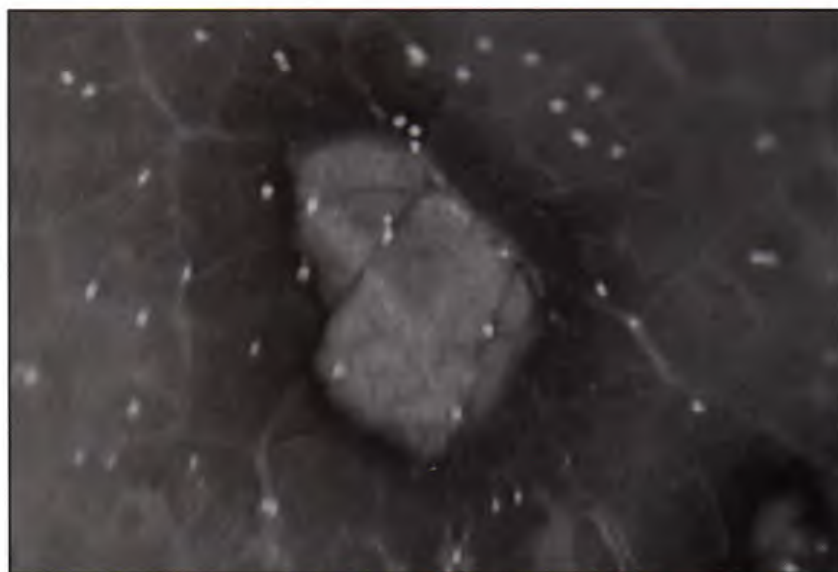
One of the questions that I was asked was — “Had it been sprayed with anything?” It had not been sprayed with anything, and the plant is so isolated that it was not a drift candidate. It is protected above by tall white pines and surrounded by eight to ten foot azaleas. I continued to observe the problem and noted that the lesions gradually coalesced and the leaves eventually wasted away (turned brown and crumbled).

Returning to the Internet, I found a report describing research on stimulating Georgia plume seed germination that had been published in 2002 by the State Botanical Garden of Georgia. It is my expectation that someone more familiar with the Georgia plume, in general, may be able to explain the lesions. I located the e-mail address of the “contact author,”



▲ Gross view of the leaf lesions.

▼ Through-a-scope view of a leaf lesion.



and recently sent an e-mail supported by three jpg images. As of this date, I have not heard back.

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