

A NEW ROOT DISEASE OF TEA ?

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During the last few years a number of estates in the Dimbulla and Agrapatna Districts have been alarmed by the number of plants that died in their old seedling tea fields following recovery after pruning. These deaths were attributed to the general debility of the plants, mainly due to the severe wood rot present in their collar and frames. Early this year a couple of estates reported the death of a large number of plants in their clonal fields following recovery after pruning, showing similar symptoms. Examination of these clonal plants did not reveal any wood rot as in the case of the seedling tea that died, but the large roots showed die-back from the distal ends. The diseased seedling tea also showed similar type of soft rot of the larger roots starting from the distal ends or end-forks of the roots.

A fungus, yet to be identified, has been found to be constantly associated with the die-back and subsequent rotting of the roots both in the seedling tea as well as in the clonal tea.

This disease syndrome and its time of occurrence does not seem to be similar to any of the root diseases of tea so far described in Sri Lanka or India.

This disease has been tentatively named the Soft Root Rot of Tea.