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It's spring… what's up with my Sycamore?

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It's spring, so why are all my Sycamore's new leaves dying and falling?

SUMMARY

Anthracnose is a non-lethal but unsightly fungal disease that overwinters in leaf litter and infects new leaves in the spring. Select resistant cultivars and practice good garden sanitation to reduce the effects.

Q. My sycamore (or ash or elm) has just begun to leaf out and then all of a sudden the leaves are browning, curling and falling to the ground. This has happened in other years. What's happening and is there anything I can do to prevent it?

A. Spring rains in Contra Costa County put young, developing leaves of sycamore, ash, oak and evergreen elms at risk of infection by waterborne anthracnose fungi. Though symptoms vary with the plant host, infection by this group of fungi can distort foliage, cause conspicuous spots or irregular dead areas in leaves, and lead to premature defoliation, branch dieback or cankering, especially in Chinese elm trees. Cankers are calloused, dead tree tissue which cause girdling of small branches, giving affected trees a gnarled or crooked appearance.

Leaves, twigs, stems, flowers and fruit all suffer the damaging effects of the anthracnose fungi, which overwinter in dead leaf litter. In spring, tiny spores. reach new plant tissues via splashing rain, germinate, and spread to newly expanding leaves and twigs. Though hot, dry weather slows the progress of the disease, if moist conditions prevail, successive generations of spores invade and infect new leaves. In California, anthracnose rarely causes permanent damage, and some cultivars do well despite the presence of these fungi.

Following these specific garden cultural practices will make your garden less susceptible to anthracnose disease development or lessen the severity of the infection if it does take hold.

- Prune and destroy, bury or bag infected plant parts. Remove diseased plants as soon as you see them. Do not compost or use infected leaves and twigs as mulch.
- Pesticides offer no reliable control of anthracnose though fungicides can be used preventively on Modesto ash. They must be applied as

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buds begin to open in spring and will not eradicate existing infections.

- Fertilize after leaves have opened and spring rains have stopped.

For Further Reading:

The University of California has a free publication – *Anthracnose* – located at http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PDF/PESTNOTES/pnanthracnose.pdf.

ANTHRACNOSE SUSCEPTIBILITY OF SOME LANDSCAPE TREE CULTIVARS	
Susceptible	**Resistant/Less Susceptible**
Ash (*Fraxinus* spp.)	
Modesto Ash (*Fraxinus velutina* 'Modesto')	Evergreen or Shamel Ash (*Fraxinus uhdei*) Moraine Ash (*F. holotricha* 'Moraine') Raywood Ash (*F. angustifolia* subsp. *oxycarpa* 'Raywood')
Chinese Evergreen Elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*)	
Ulmus parvifolia 'Evergreen' *U. parvifolia* 'True Green'	*Ulmus parvifolia* 'Drake'
Dogwood (*Cornus* spp.)	
Chinese Dogwood (*Cornus kousa* var. *chinensis)*	Kousa dogwood (*C. kousa* cultivars-many) Flowering Dogwood (*C. florida* 'Appalachian Spring', 'Spring Grove', 'Sunset') Japanese cornel (*C. officinalis*)
Oak (*Quercus* spp.)	
White Oak (*Quercus alba*)	Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*)
Privet (*Ligustrum* spp.)	
Common Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*)	Amur Privet (*Ligustrum amurense*) Border Privet (*L. obtusifolium*) Regel Privet (*L. obtusifolium* var. *regelianum*)
Sycamore (*Platanus* spp.)	
American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) California Sycamore (*P. racemosa*) Yarwood London Plane (*P.* × *acerifolia* 'Yarwood') unless regularly pollarded	London Plane cultivars: *Platanus* × *acerifolia* 'Bloodgood' *P.* × *acerifolia* 'Columbia' *P.* × *acerifolia* 'Liberty'