

Spray Now to Be Sure to Have Peaches This Summer

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 29, 2017

Q: For the past couple of years I have sprayed my peach and pear trees with a dormant spray but I have still been plagued with peach leaf curl or fire blight. What can I do control these diseases?

A: Since you mention trying to control peach leaf curl and fire blight I am assuming that you are using a fixed copper dormant spray.

Dormant sprays can be oil, copper or sulfur based. The oil based sprays are used when you want to control insects overwintering such as scale or mites.

In the past most dormant sprays used for control of fungal diseases such as shot hole and peach leaf curl had a lime sulfur base or were a copper sulfate and lime mix like the UC Bordeaux mixture; see UC Pest note 7481 for more information on the Bordeaux mix.

However, since 2011 home gardeners in California can no longer purchase lime sulfur sprays and the ingredients to make the Bordeaux mix may be difficult to find. As a result the only dormant sprays available for use have been oil or copper based.



(Photo: Jenna Waite)

The copper sprays are not as effective against peach leaf curl or fire blight so this may be why you are seeing such poor control of the disease. You may see some of the oil-based sprays marketed as fungicides but the UC has not found them to be effective against peach leaf curl or fire blight.

To get the best results in controlling peach leaf curl from the copper sprays, you will need to spray at least three times several weeks apart and the last spray should be as the tree is just starting to bloom. It is also important to make sure that there will be a couple of days of dry weather after each time you spray the tree and that you get good coverage of the tree. I like to spray near Thanksgiving, New Year's Day and Valentine's Day, however, this does depend on weather conditions around those times.

Each time you spray your trees, you should soak the entire tree and the ground around the base of the tree with the dormant spray. It is also important to clean up any leaves and old fruit as these can carry the fungal disease overwinter.

For fire blight control, spray the tree as it is blooming, according to the UC IPM pest note on Fire Blight. See Pest Note number 7414: "Copper products are the only materials available to homeowners for fire blight control, and they often don't provide adequate control even with multiple applications. A very weak (about 0.5 percent) Bordeaux mixture or other copper product applied several times as blossoms open might reduce new infections but won't eliminate all new infections or those already existing in wood. The spray must be applied to open blossoms; thus the number of applications needed depends on the length of the bloom period."

To get complete control of fire blight, you may have to cut out any infected wood right after the tree finishes blooming.

Warm wet springs such as we had last year contribute to both peach leaf curl and fire blight disease. So you may not have as many problems this year if we have a drier spring. I don't recommend using dormant sprays unless you have had a problem with diseases or insects in the past on your fruit trees or roses.

For more information on controlling peach leaf curl and fire blight see, the UC IPM pest notes at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/index.html>.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.