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Apricots and Brown Rot

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Brown rot – A common disease of apricots and other stone fruit.

SUMMARY

Brown rot is a serious fungus that affects all stone fruits. However, apricots require that disease management occurs later in the season, different from the other stone fruits.

Q. I have an apricot tree that is at least ten years old. In general, the tree seems to be growing well but over the last few years, I have not gotten much fruit. In springtime, why do the blossoms turn brown and some of the branches ooze sap?

A. Most likely you are seeing the effects of a fungal disease called brown rot. Brown rot, caused by a fungus (*Monilinia* spp.), is the most common blossom and fruit disease of stone fruits and can seriously affect not only apricot but peach, nectarine, plum, cherry and almonds.

Symptoms of brown rot

The first symptom of brown rot is browning and withering of blossoms. The infection may then spread to surrounding twigs and branches which will exude brown sticky droplets of gum and form cankers. Dieback and death of these twigs and branches can occur. Infected fruit will develop tan velvety spots over the fruit surface.

The fungus survives the winter inside

dead infected blossoms that remain on the tree, in infected twigs and branches, and in dried, rotted fruit that stays attached to the tree or falls to the ground. Spores produced at these sites in spring are carried through the air by wind and splashing water to infect flowers of the new year's crop. Water must be present on the flower surface for infection to occur so brown rot is more prevalent when it rains during blossom time.

How to manage brown rot

Management of this disease in the home garden should focus on removing sites of infection which are the source of spore production and future infections. Prune out and destroy affected blossoms and twigs as soon as they appear in the spring. You can use this approach on all stone fruit except apricots.

Apricot management is different.

If apricots are pruned during wet weather they can become infected with a different fungus (*Cytosporina* spp.), causing a condition known as eutypa dieback. Eutypa causes limbs or twigs to



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wilt and die suddenly in late spring or summer and also produces an oozing gum. Like brown rot, eutypa spores are spread by rain but infect apricot trees through pruning wounds, not blossoms. To protect your apricots from eutypa:

- Prune after all possibility of spring rains.
- Summer pruning should be completed at least 6 weeks before the first fall rains.

For your brown rot problem, start after harvest with the following:

- Remove all the fruit still hanging on the tree.
- Prune out branches with diseased twigs, looking for gum droplets on twigs and dead blossoms still clinging to the branches, as they

contain overwintering brown rot infections.

- Clean up all the fallen debris from the ground.
- Destroy prunings by burning, bagging, or burying. If these infected plant materials remain exposed, they may produce spores that can reinfect your tree next spring.

Get more information.

The University of California provides additional information on the management of both brown rot and eutypa dieback at the following sites:

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/FRUIT/DISEASE/aprbrownrot.html>

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/FRUIT/DISEASE/eutypadieback.html>



Photo by Jack Kelly Clark, Courtesy UC Statewide IPM Program