

There are a variety of pests and diseases that attack stone fruit.

***Growing Stone Fruit - Spraying***

Leaf curl and brown rot are the two major diseases that can harm stone fruit trees. Leaf curl is a fungal disease which is a problem during spring and when the weather is cool and wet. The infected leaves become swollen, thickened and distorted. The leaves may be light green or reddish in colour.

Brown rot affects all stone fruit, on twigs, blossoms and fruit. It is a fungal disease, presenting as a brown mouldy blotch on fruit skins that gradually expands and causes the fruit to spoil. Like most fungal diseases, it thrives in humid weather.

Another disease is bacterial canker which is caused by a bacterial pathogen. This disease can affect all parts of all stone fruits although some are more susceptible than others. The outer bark is killed and the underlying bark tissue is orange to brown, often with a strong sour smell. Copious amounts of gum may exude from the trunk and bark cankers. Dead areas of tissue become sunken as surrounding areas of healthy tissue continue to grow, resulting in the typical canker.

Mites, scale and aphids may also cause problems.

Spraying is an important prevention program to ensure a disease-free crop of fruit. There are a number of products on the market that will do the job. You can also make your own copper and lime spray.

The discovery of the copper-based fungicide in the late 19th century saved the French wine industry of the time from the devastating effects of downy mildew. Professor Pierre-Marie-Alexis Millardet of Bordeaux, a French Botanist and Mycologist discovered that copper destroys fungal spores on plants. He developed a mixture now known as the “Bordeaux Spray” which is a fungicide consisting of [hydrated lime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydrated_lime), [copper sulphate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_sulfate) and water. It was the first fungicide to be used worldwide, and is still used today.

It is sprayed at specific times when the trees are bare and leafless as the copper and lime-based sprays will burn foliage and damage blooms. However, the spray can destroy spores that are lying in wait for warmer conditions. If the spores are left untreated they begin to infest fruit trees as the weather warms with diseases such as brown rot and leaf curl.

Homemade Bordeaux spray is economical. Mix ¾ cup of builders’ lime with 2.25L of water in a plastic bucket. Do not use metal buckets as the mix reacts with metal. Stir well with a wooden or plastic spoon. Take a separate plastic bucket, add ½ cup of copper sulphate, available from hardware stores or chemists, then add 2.25L of water. Thoroughly stir, and then pour this mixture into the lime water, while stirring continuously. The Bordeaux spray is ready to use immediately. Pour the mix into a sprayer. Wet all plant surfaces thoroughly, especially bark fissures. Bordeaux spray settles, so shake the sprayer every now and then. Wash off any spray that splashes onto turf, or other foliage, using fresh water. Thoroughly clean out sprayers with warm soapy water, paying particular attention to nozzles.

The timing is crucial when spraying trees to prevent and control brown rot, leaf curl, scale, mite, aphids and mealybug. Spray at:

* Leaf fall
* Winter when dormant
* When blossoms start to turn pink and before leaves appear.

Peaches and plums may be affected by Oriental Fruit Moth during summer. The larvae tunnel down new shoots, causing leaves to die and go brown. Fruit may also be attacked.

Cherries, pears and plums are commonly attacked by Pear and Cherry Slug. The slugs chew on the leaves weakening the tree and lowering the crop yield. The slugs can actually kill young trees.

To treat both Oriental Fruit Moth and Pear and Cherry Slug, spray with Yates Success when first noticed or ask your local nursery for an appropriate product. Alternatively, small trees can be dusted with ash from the fireplace. The ash particles adhere to the skin of the slug and suffocate it.

**Sources**

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**Please Note:**

**Annual subscriptions to the Wentworth Falls Garden Club are due at the May 2014 meeting. The cost $20.**