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# How Can I Prevent Diseased Trees This Spring?

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A weekly question/answer column

## How Can I Prevent Diseased Trees This Spring?

*Jerry Goodspeed\* answers:*

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April 25, 2002

There are several tree diseases to be aware of this time of year. Prevention now can save you time and money, and possibly the life of your tree. Consider the following information.

- Aspen leaf spot causes small dark spots on the leaves and is one of the most common diseases of aspen trees. This fungal disease is spread by wind and rain and attacks the leaves as they begin to emerge in the spring. In late spring and early summer, the spots are less noticeable, so most aspen owners forget to give them proper treatment. However, as the summer progresses, these spots enlarge and seem to envelope all the leaves and the entire tree. Severe infestations can defoliate the tree, weaken it and leave it more vulnerable to other diseases and insects. Regardless of the severity, it is aesthetically unappealing.

The time for treatment is when the disease is spreading and the amount of damage is small. Apply a registered fungicide that has aspen and leaf spot listed on the label, such as Daconil. Be sure to follow all label directions.

- Anthracnose is another disease that spreads in the spring. The disease usually goes unnoticed until summer, which is unfortunately after the time of treatment has passed. It can attack maples, sycamores, oaks and ash trees. The problem is worse when spring weather is wet and cool. It is similar to leaf spot because once it is really noticeable, it is too late to do anything. Anthracnose looks like small spots on leaves that appear to be water soaked. These spots, which are usually found along the veins, enlarge and eventually turn red, brown or black. It spreads to the petiole of the leaf, and can eventually infect small twigs and branches. Severe cases defoliate the tree and cause some twigs and smaller branches to die.

Treatment is similar to that for controlling leaf spot. In addition to applying a fungicide now, the leaves should be raked up and destroyed in the fall. If possible, keep sprinklers away from the foliage of these trees to keep leaves as dry as possible. Normally anthracnose and leaf spot are not fatal diseases, even if left untreated.

- Fire blight is a disease that can be fatal. This is not a fungal disease like the other two, but a bacteria that infects pears, apples, cotoneasters, hawthorns, pyracantha and mountain ash. Trees and shrubs infected with this disease have leaves that wilt and dry. The leaves and twigs turn brown and black and appear to be scorched -- hence the name fire blight. Close examination of the affected area will reveal a white, cream or reddish-colored ooze coming from wounds. Often the twigs will take on a shepherd's crook shape

as they wilt. Fire blight is spread during warm, wet springs. It is generally carried by insects from flower to flower. It then spreads down the twigs from the infected flowers. Severe cases of fire blight can kill a pear tree in one season. Normally, however, this disease does not move that quickly.

If fire blight is noticed later in the summer after bloom, the only treatment is to remove the infected wood. Cut the twig or branch 8 to 12 inches below the infection and remove the wood from the landscape or orchard.

Control measures for most of these diseases are taken when the trees are in bloom. If it doesn't rain or the trees don't receive moisture during the bloom time, treatment generally isn't necessary. However, if the spring weather is warm and wet while the trees are in bloom, apply a fire blight spray (containing streptomycin) or a fixed copper spray according to label instructions.

- Watch the weather this spring, and if it gets wet and nasty, be ready to treat any trees that have had problems in the past.

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