



Adding Color to Your Life

FIREBLIGHT

Fireblight is a bacterial disease that is particularly destructive to apples and crabapples. It also affects serviceberry, mountain ash, pears, cotoneasters, and, in some cases, cherries and plums. Fireblight is spread by wind, rain, splashing water, birds and insects. It is highly contagious and is common in the valley here in Sheridan County. It is especially bad during cool, wet springs.

Symptoms of fireblight include: wilting leaves that can gradually, or fairly rapidly, turn brown. The leaf stems will turn black and the branch tips will also turn black, as though they have been 'burned' by a torch, hence the name fireblight. In some cases the branch tips will turn down, creating the characteristic 'shepherd's crook' look. Sometimes clear or brownish/orange fluid can be seen near the site of infection, or running down the branch.

Control

Plant disease resistant varieties. While this is a good defense, it is important to realize that nothing is immune from disease. Even disease resistant varieties can be infected if they are stressed, or are overwhelmed by exposure. Maintain the health of your trees with adequate water, and protect them from damage or other stress factors.

Prune out infected branches. This can be done at any time, and the sooner the better to remove the source of infection from the environment. Before making the first pruning cut, and after each cut, disinfect pruning tools with a bleach or rubbing alcohol solution made up of 1 part bleach/alcohol to 6 parts water. Prune 8-12" below the sign of infection. Destroy infected material by burning or burial; do not compost the branches or stems. If the infection has entered the main stem of the tree, there is little hope for recovery.

Spray the tree in the spring. In the spring as the new buds start to swell, spray the tree with an antibiotic containing streptomycin or erythromycin. Follow the label mixing instructions. Spray at 5 to 7 day intervals until the flowers are done blooming. This treatment may need to be repeated for 2 to 3 years to bring the disease under control.