Peach leaf curl occurs annually on peaches in commercial orchards as well as in the home landscape and can cause severe defoliation, weakened trees, and reduced fruit quality, set, and yield. Peaches, apricots, and nectarines are all susceptible. A similar disease, known as plum pockets, occurs on wild and cultivated plums. Although leaf curl and plum pockets are springtime diseases, controls are best applied in the fall.

Symptoms, Cause, Disease Cycle

PEACH LEAF CURL
The disease is most noticeable on the leaves within a month after bloom and is easily recognized by the thickened, folded, puckered, and curled leaf blades. Symptoms may be present on the entire leaf or just on parts of the leaf, and are usually accompanied by a red or purplish coloration, making them especially conspicuous. In some cases, every leaf on a tree may be infected. The diseased areas develop a powdery gray coating and leaves may then turn brown, wither, and drop from the tree.

Twig and fruit infection, which is less conspicuous, can also occur. Yearly defoliation resulting from peach leaf curl or plum pockets can seriously weaken the trees and make them more sensitive to cold injury. Peach leaf curl is caused the fungus *Taphrina deformans*.

Infection occurs during the spring just as the buds begin to swell. Spring rains wash spores of the fungus to the surface of leaf buds and provide conditions for spores to multiply. Once the bud scales loosen in spring, spores are carried in water films to the emerging leaf tissue where infection takes place. Rain and temperatures...
between 50 and 70 degrees are necessary for infection; when temperatures are cool, slowly emerging leaves are exposed to the fungus for longer periods of time. After infection occurs in late winter or early spring, there is no further spread of the disease during that season.

**PLUM POCKETS**

This disease is caused by a fungus (*Taphrina communis*) which is closely related to the peach leaf curl organism. The tips of the plum shoots appear swollen and are often twisted and curled. The fruit frequently appears swollen, misshapen, and bladder-like with thick spongy flesh. The centers of infected fruit are hollow due to the failure of the young seed to develop. Distortion of the leaves can also occur. The disease cycle is very similar to that of peach leaf curl.

**Implement Disease Control When Trees Are Dormant**

A single spray, using the correct material, if applied before bud swell, will provide nearly perfect control of leaf curl. There are no fungicides capable of controlling this disease once infection has occurred.

A single application of fungicide containing active ingredients chlorothalonil, copper hydroxide, copper oxychloride sulfate, copper sulfate + hydrated lime (Bordeaux mixture) or ziram should be made during the tree’s dormant period between the time the leaves drop in late fall and when the buds swell in the early spring. The autumn is a good time to spray because the ground is often dry then and a because a midwinter thaw causing premature bud swell makes subsequent sprays useless.

Select peach cultivars having disease tolerance. Varieties derived from Redhaven have some tolerance to leaf curl whereas Redskin types are more susceptible. Where leaf curl has occurred, thin fruit heavily to reduce demand on remaining leaves and reduce drought stress by periodic irrigation.

Trees showing symptoms should be provided with good growing conditions to counteract the stress of leaf loss due to peach leaf curl.

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