Black knot is aptly named for the conspicuous black knotty growths that form on branches infected with this disease. It is a problem which may occur on American, Japanese or European varieties of cultivated plums and prunes; on cultivated sweet and sour cherries; on flowering Prunus species; and on wild plums and cherries.

**Symptoms**
Infection takes place in the spring but knot development on twigs and branches is not evident until fall. Initially the irregular swellings or knots are small and light brown.

One year after infection the enlarging knots become olive green with a velvety surface. As the season progresses the swellings harden and become coal black in color. By this time the knots have enlarged considerably and may be as long as 6 inches.

Often only one side of a limb is affected, however, in some cases the limbs may become completely encircled. Knots continue to expand in the following years until the branch is girdled and dies. Old knots may become covered with a white or pink parasitic mold.

**Spread**
Black knot is caused by the fungus Apiosporina morbosa (formerly Dibotryon morbosum). Microscopic spores of the fungus are discharged in the spring and are spread by wind and rain. Infections can occur in elongating twig tissues from bud break to shuck split.

**Disease Management**
Pruning and sanitation are the primary means of reducing or eliminating black knot problems. Pruning is best accomplished in the fall or winter when the lack of foliage makes it easier to locate branches with galls. Cuts should be made 4 to 8 inches below the knot. Surgical removal of the black swollen tissue may be necessary if the trunk and large limbs have become infected. All diseased wood should be discarded and/or destroyed. Examine infected trees before the buds open in April and prune out all newly formed knots. The removal of wild plum and cherry trees in the area of valuable
cultivated susceptible trees is also advised wherever practical.

Fungicide applications may help, but their effect is limited, especially if other control measures have not been used. Lime sulfur can be applied as a dormant spray in the spring prior to bud swell.

In orchards where black knot has been a problem, it may help to use a longer term protective fungicide program along with the eradicative pruning program. Fungicide sprays can be applied in as part of the regular spray schedule.

Homeowners should refer to publication ID-21, “Disease and Insect Control for Home Grown Fruit in Kentucky.” Commercial growers should refer to the UK fruit spray schedule, ID-92.

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