

Wet Weather Diseases

Over the last few years, we have had relatively wet spring weather. When this occurs, spring flowers last longer and we do not have to use so much irrigation water outside. However, in other ways, the wet weather makes worse certain potential problems. A couple of these include two plant diseases, fire blight and iron chlorosis.

Fire blight is a bacterial disease that impacts pears, apples and some other common landscape species. The bacteria overwinter in cankers on infected plants. As plants begin actively growing, ooze is exuded from the cankers containing millions of spores. This ooze is attractive as a food source to various insects that also often visit spring flowers of susceptible trees and shrubs. As the flowers are visited, spores are introduced into them. Bacteria additionally infect trees through blossoms by splashing water during wet weather or can be spread into through fresh wounds from things such as pruning.

A few preventative measures are available. A primary one is to plant resistant species, especially where fire blight is more prevalent. Otherwise, products known as agricultural antibiotics can be sprayed onto open blossoms to deter infection. Keep in mind that agricultural antibiotics are only effective while trees are flowering. Follow product labels for spray timing and rates. Unfortunately, once the disease is in a tree, the only treatment is pruning infected branches out. Hopefully bacteria do not get into the main trunk. For more information concerning resistant apple varieties and fire blight, visit the following web page: www.extension.usu.edu/cache/htm/horticulture.

Unlike fire blight, iron chlorosis is an environmental disease and not caused by a pathogen. Instead, plant roots, for various reasons, lack the capacity to uptake sufficient amounts of iron from the soil. This is especially common during cool, wet weather. Symptoms of the disease include yellow leaves with bright-green veins. In moderate to severe cases, a portion of these leaves scorch to a brown or black color. This disease occurred last spring in many plants that normally are not affected. However, with warmer, dryer weather, the problem went away on its own.

Iron chlorosis is additionally common in several regularly used but less adapted landscape plants, including many maples. Extremely alkaline soils and over watering often also induce the condition or make the problem worse. The disease is frequently problematic for the entire life these less adapted plants. There are no easy solutions. One that is somewhat more effective than others is a soil application of EDDHA iron. Products containing this ingredient are available from local retailers and should be applied in early spring, before plants leaf out, for maximum effect. Most other soil applied iron products are less effective. In larger trees, it may be possible to insert iron containing devices into tree trunks, but this involves damaging the trunk. These treatments do not last for more than two years. When shopping for landscape plants, it is best to research what plants are more adapted to our local growing conditions. More information about iron chlorosis can be found at: <http://utahpests.usu.edu/plantdiseases/htm/non-pathogenic/iron/>.