

## Year Round Gardening

# Fire Blight Showing Up in Spring Blooming Trees

Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

Fire blight is a bacterial infection of trees and shrubs in the rose family, *Rosaceae*. Impacted trees and shrubs include apples, crabapples (including ornamentals), pears, serviceberries, cotoneasters, hawthorns, pyracantha and even blackberry and raspberry bushes. It is a very destructive infection which can kill infected plants if not treated. The bacteria are spread to blooms by insects during the spring. If the bloom period is warm the disease will spread more easily, wind and rain also encourage spread of the pathogen.

The first symptoms appear during the bloom, but on a large tree may be easily missed. Infected

branches will have blooms which appear water soaked, wilt rapidly then turn brown. As the disease progresses leaves wilt, turn brown, but do not fall off. Branch ends may bend, resembling a 'shepherd's crooks'. Effected areas may have a scorched appearance hence the name fire blight.

Cankers (depressions in the bark) may form, you may see a bacterial ooze. These cankers will be dark colored, slightly sunken and have a narrow callus ridge.

While the disease cannot be cured there are management practices which can keep your tree healthy even when the bacteria are present.

If you notice symptoms in summer it is important to prune all infected branches at least 8 to 12" below the edge of infection. Be very careful to use clean pruners and sterilize



between each cut dipping the blades into bleach or alcohol. Once all infected material is removed carefully monitor the plant for more symptoms and prune as soon as you observe any more infection. In autumn once the leaves fall, recheck the tree for any branches which did not drop their leaves. Remove these branches once the tree is dormant, late November or December.

In spring, during the bloom, you can spray the trees with an anti-bacterial agent. Contact a licensed arborist in late winter if you wish to have your trees sprayed so the application can be properly timed.

While there is no sure prevention of this disease if you are contemplating adding a flowering or fruit tree to your landscape there are some varieties that are more resistant to fire blight than others. Good maintenance pruning practices can reduce the risk of infection.

For more information check out Colorado State University Extension Fact Sheet 2.907 Fire Blight at <http://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/garden/02907.pdf>.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers Get answers to your horticulture questions at [www.ask.extension.org](http://www.ask.extension.org) or by calling a Master Gardener Volunteer at 520-7684 or emailing [CSUmg2@elpasoco.com](mailto:CSUmg2@elpasoco.com). Volunteers are available to help you Monday through Friday from 9:00 to noon.