

Peach leaf curl

GWF463

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Red blisters and thick, curled-up leaves are a sure sign of peach leaf curl, a serious fungal disease that also affects almonds and nectarines.

Q What is peach leaf curl?

A This is a serious and spectacular fungal disease of the peach family, which results in severe leaf damage. Peach leaf curl affects peaches, almonds and nectarines. It is rare on apricots, or on plants grown under glass. The disease is likely to be most severe during a cold, wet, spring.

Q How do I recognise it?

A The symptoms are red blisters and thickened areas on leaves. These then curl, usually downwards, and fall early. The initial pale-green or yellow colour turns bright red or purple, giving way to white and grey as the disease progresses, and ending up brown as the leaves die.

New, unaffected foliage is usually produced later in the year. Young shoots, flowers and fruits can also be attacked. Fruits and flowers may fall early, and the twigs become stunted, but seldom distorted. Occasional attacks don't do much harm, but if the tree is attacked repeatedly, cropping can decline.

Q What causes it?

A The fungus *Taphrina deformans*, which is one of a family of fungi that deforms leaves, flowers and fruits.

Q Tell me more about it.

A When the leaves go grey and powdery, spores are being produced. They overwinter on the tree, in the bark, and possibly beneath the scales of the buds. These are washed into the buds in early spring and infect the leaves as they uncurl.

As the fungal strands or mycelium spread through the leaf tissue, they induce the leaves to grow excessively, causing them to enlarge and distort.

Later, the spores produce fungal threads which break through the leaf surface to make a powdery grey, felt-like area. The spores are carried on the breeze and by rain splash to infect new, young leaves. Infection is most rapid when the buds have just opened. Older leaves are less easily infected and warm, dry conditions also reduces infection.

Q How do I control peach leaf curl?

A Hot, dry summers tend to check the development of the disease. Once it gets a hold it is very difficult to control. Pick off badly affected leaves as soon as they are seen, and before they develop a bloom of spores. Bin them to reduce the source of infection for the following year. Make sure the tree has enough food and water to promote healthy new leaves.

Q Can it be prevented?

A Yes. There are two techniques. The most effective is to prevent the spores washing into the buds by building a plastic shelter to keep the rain off. Keep this in place from January to April. Make sure the tree is ventilated by leaving the sides of the plastic open and allow the roots to receive water by leaving a gap near the ground. Covering is easiest with wall-trained plants. If it's not possible to cover up a free-standing tree, apply a copper-based fungicide approved for use on fruit. Spray in late January or early February and again two weeks later. Aim to get complete coverage of the entire tree, but finish spraying before the flower buds begin to open. Spray again in the autumn.

Chemical information

Brand names of garden products change frequently, whereas the active chemical ingredient in them usually doesn't. Because of this, we list the active chemical ingredient recommended for a given problem, rather than the brand name of the product. The only exception is when we have tested a brand and chosen it as a **Best Buy**. If you need any more information on chemicals, please ask for our factsheet GWF281.