

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Homan April 22, 2022

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Cedar Apple Rust

The birds are singing, the tulips are blooming, and junipers (also called red cedars) are “blooming” in another fashion. Cedar apple rust is here. The pathogen (a fungus) spends part of its life cycle on a juniper tree, and the other part of its life cycle on apple hosts such as; apples, crabapples, hawthorns, or quince.

Those jelly-like orange masses on the junipers produce spores that infect the apple hosts. Once infection occurs, leaf spots on apple leaves develop in 1-3 weeks. Eventually, fungal spores are produced in these leaf spots on the apple tissues. The spores are spread by wind and rain back to junipers starting in about July. Without both hosts, the fungus can't complete its life cycle.

The disease looks dramatic on junipers, but it does not cause any harm to the evergreen trees. The rusts can cause problems in the apple host, however. If infection is severe, many leaves drop off early and the tree is weakened due to reduced photosynthesis. If your tree only gets a small amount of rust each year, it probably won't be an issue for long term tree health.

Management options for apple hosts:

1) Resistance: For new plantings of fruiting or flowering apples, consider planting a rust-resistant variety. Information on crabapple cultivars is available at your local Extension Office, call for more information.

2) Tree care: For any apple tree, proper pruning will allow air movement through the canopy. This practice reduces the leaf wetness that promotes disease. Maintaining overall tree health will also help prevent the disease.

3) Fungicides: Homeowners with a bad history of this disease (severe defoliation), might consider preventative fungicide sprays on the apple hosts when leaves are out and the orange galls are active. For best control, applications should continue through May or as long as the orange galls are active.

Products with the active ingredients myclobutanil or propiconazole are examples of materials labeled for cedar apple rust management in flowering crabapples and non-fruiting apples. Propiconazole products include Bonide Infuse Concentrate and Fertilome Liquid Systemic Fungicide. Some myclobutanil products are labeled for fruiting apples. However, in all cases, make sure you check the label carefully.

Spring time means many plants are blooming. Don't panic if you see cedar apple rust's orange, jelly like galls on your evergreen trees. The galls will eventually dry up and the tree will not be harmed. If you have apple trees, plan out a spray schedule for the season. If you have any questions, please call your local Post Rock Extension Office.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at choman@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (738-3597).