

Anthracnose Diseases of Common Landscape Trees

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Diagnosis

Anthracnoses are plant diseases that usually affect the foliage and stems of our landscape ornamentals. The anthracnose diseases of our common landscape trees and shrubs may actually be caused by several unique fungal microorganisms. The most common fungi include members of the genera such as *Discula*, *Kabatiella*, and *Apiognomonia*. These microscopic organisms produce literally thousands of spores on infected plant tissues during wet weather. These spores are responsible for the rapid spread of the disease during the early spring months on our maple, sycamore, dogwood, and oak trees.

Symptoms

The fungal microorganisms that cause anthracnose diseases on most trees usually affect the above-ground portions of the plant. The most common symptoms are found on the stems and/or leaves. After the fungus gains entry into the leaves or stems through either wounds or by direct penetration, death of the surrounding tissue often develops quickly. If relative humidity or moisture is high in the plant's environment, twig dieback and defoliation often result. Thus, anthracnose diseases are most devastating during the spring when rainfall is common and temperatures are cool (60–65 degrees F).

Prescription

Selective pruning, in conjunction with sanitation, is the most effective tool in managing the anthracnose diseases. Dead twigs should be pruned and destroyed. Pruning is most effective when done during the dormant season when the fungal organisms are least active. Pruning cuts should be made 4–6 inches below the area where dead and living tissues meet on the stems or twigs. The dead wood (canker) is important in the survival of the fungus from one season to the next. Since the anthracnose fungi may survive on dead leaf tissue, leaves should be raked and burned if burning is allowed in the community. If burning is not permitted, leaves should be removed from the area.

Trees and shrubs considered to be “high value” specimens may be sprayed with a protectant fungicide. The best time to apply a protectant fungicide is the fall, before leaves fall. Complete coverage of the tree or shrub during the fall is important for chemical control to be effective. Spraying taller trees may not be economical in some cases.

Landscape trees and shrubs should be watered and fertilized properly to maximize vigor. Fertilization should be based on regular soil tests. In many instances, a stressed plant is often more susceptible to anthracnose and other infectious diseases. Promoting good plant growth is an integral part of disease management.

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