



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

May showers bring fungus, and planting opportunities!

May 17, 2026

Spots on tree leaves?

Entomosporium leaf spot fungus on ornamental pears is widespread this year. The reddish-purple spots are also common on India hawthorn (*Rhaphiolepis*), red-tip photinia (*Photinia x Fraseri*), and our native toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*). This occurs periodically when we have the right concatenation of circumstances: rainfall with warming temperatures. I have records of heavy infection years in 2011, 2019, and now in 2026. Similar diseases affect other, unrelated species such as walnuts. It's not the same pathogen, but the same basic lifecycle.

The spores of *Entomosporium mespili*, splash with rain from leaf to leaf. The spots spread and coalesce, and sometimes the infection enters the petiole (the part that attaches the leaf to the stem). When the petiole gets infected, that leaf yellows and drops. In a bad year as many as 10 to 20% of a pear tree's leaves can fall.

The pear species most affected is *Pyrus kawakami*, sometimes called the evergreen pear because its leaves usually hang on through the winter. Entomosporium is not as common, but can occur, on apples, hawthorns, loquats, and other plant species in the *pome* group of the rose family. It is often confused with fireblight because that disease (which is bacterial, not fungal) attacks the same species of plants.

Rain in April and early May leads to infection. If the rainstorms occur a few days apart, we get continued infection. Spots show up in a couple of days, leaves begin to drop a couple of days later. If it rains again, infection occurs again.

The cycle stops when it stops raining, temperatures get into the 80s, and daytime humidity drops below about 50%. That means that by mid-May we are rarely seeing new infection, by late May any leaves that are going to drop have done so, and new growth is already replacing the lost leaves.

There is no spray that cures this. Sprays recommended on legitimate sites are preventatives, so they wouldn't work now anyway, and most have very low efficacy. Home remedies such as baking soda and neem will likely do more harm than good.

Just rake up and throw away the leaves on the ground and be patient. The tree will outgrow it.

A few weeks ago, we were seeing fireblight, especially on fruiting pears. Bradford pears and other varieties of *Pyrus calleryana* were blighted badly about three weeks ago and dieback is continuing. While nobody is recommending these trees anymore, we still have hundreds of them around town and they look awful.

Fireblight causes very visible, discrete areas of infection which can be pruned out. It's simplest to wait until the infection cycle ends with the arrival of warmer, drier weather. There is no spray



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that I can recommend for home gardeners to use for fireblight. Commercial apple and pear growers use streptomycin, an antibiotic, which is not something home gardeners can do.

Spraying for fireblight isn't typically necessary anyway. A healthy tree will outgrow it. But if you're choosing a fruiting pear to plant, avoid those that are susceptible (Bartlett) and plant one that is resistant (Moonglow, Warren, and Shinko).

What to plant now?

May is a very active planting time in our vegetable and flower gardens!

It's a great time to plant:

- tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, and tomatillos.
- summer squash, melons, and cucumbers.
- beans, radishes, beets, carrots.
- Swiss chard, green onions, strawberries.

Temperatures are finally perfect for planting basil.

If you have room, plant corn, winter squash, and pumpkins.

Most of these will be simplest from transplants. Root vegetables are best grown from seed. Corn, beans, and squash can be grown from transplants or can be directly seeded into the garden. Watch for snail and earwigs as the seedlings emerge.

Mid-May through June we plant the heat-loving annual summer flowers, including zinnias, marigolds, cosmos, celosia, amaranthus, and much more. Perennial summer flowers we can plant now include California fuchsia (*Epilobium*, formerly *Zauschneria*), coreopsis, dahlias, gaillardia, gloriosa daisy (*Rudbeckia*), scabiosa, Shasta daisies, and statice.

It is not the right season for leafy greens such as lettuce or spinach, kale, cabbage, broccoli, onions, and garlic, nor is it the right time to plant cilantro. These are all planted in fall and winter.

"When do we plant those wildflowers I see blooming now?"

Native wildflowers blooming right now include California poppies, clarkias and godetias, tidy tips (*Layia platyglossa*), and red maids (*Calandrinia ciliata*). They are best planted in fall, at the start of the rainfall season. The seedlings grow through the winter and then bloom in late winter and spring, finishing up as the weather gets hot and dry.

Ideal is to scatter the seeds on bare soil in a sunny location in fall, just as a rainstorm is coming in.

Plant something new!

How about ground cherries, which are sweet-fruited relatives of tomatillos? Or bitter melon? Easy, vigorous vines with alien-looking fruit that's used in soups. Or maybe a super-sweet corn



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with colorful kernels ranging from purple to pink! Most corn with colorful kernels is either starchy and used for flour, or ornamental. According to Johnny's Seeds, this new variety is "sweet, rich, satisfying, and nicely textured, ... a farm crew favorite."

Watering

Check your seedlings daily and water as needed. With the mild weather we'd been having most gardeners have been able to water every 2 to 3 days. With dry winds expected this weekend, little plants will dry out more quickly.

We're already seeing problems with insufficient irrigation in raised planter beds. This is because the soil you filled the beds with is faster draining than your garden soil. Raised planters often need water nearly daily throughout the summer. Your garden soil retains moisture better. So, our recommendations will differ as the season progresses.

In the ground you can water more deeply and less often as the plants grow. A drip system running for a couple of hours can provide sufficient water for several days. In raised planters you will likely need to water daily for 30 to 45 minutes.

Mulching can make a big difference right now. It will shade the soil and help retain moisture. Straw or hay, compost, or arborist wood chips are all suitable.

If you didn't apply fertilizer at the time of planting, this is a good time to feed the young vegetable and flower starts. Packaged plant food can be sprinkled on the surface, cultivated lightly, and watered in. Soluble plant food such as fish emulsion also works well.

Resources.

Nursery and landscape professionals are increasingly frustrated by the poor quality of gardening information online. Google is useless as it returns primarily commercial links, many of which are completely fake. AI results about horticulture and gardening usually include misinformation, hallucinations, botanical names that literally don't exist, complete lack of nuance or judgment in evaluating scientific information, and more. I've even heard of people generating landscape designs via AI programs, and while they're fun to look at (non-existent plants, species from wildly different climates), they're really wasting everyone's time.

There's a reason for using plant and design professionals to get guidance on plant selection and pest issues. Gardening practices should be based on scientific principles, home remedies should not be recommended, and it's important to know the regional differences in soil and climate that will guide your plant selections and pest management strategies.



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Online resources are getting harder to find, so bookmark the good ones when you find them. One of the most useful for pest problems is <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/>, the long-running science-based Integrated Pest Management site managed by the UC Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources.

I mention this because one of the common questions I get follows this pattern: "I have this problem on my _____, so I sprayed it with neem and Captain Jack's. That didn't work. What do I do now?"

In Integrated Pest Management, we call this "ready, fire, aim!".

The first principle of IPM is to identify the pest! Whether we're talking about insects, mites, fungus, bacteria, or weeds, choosing the best strategy is going to vary depending on the life cycle of the particular pest.

Neem products are not entirely benign and can burn the foliage during periods of high temperature. Captain Jack's contains a broad-spectrum insecticide. It's organic, but it still harms beneficials and pollinators. Using any pesticide should be an informed decision and a last resort, even if it's labeled organic.

Once identified, you monitor the pest to determine if the problem is increasing (most pest and disease problems solve themselves within a few weeks).

Speaking of resources...

The UC Master Gardener Program of Yolo County has great information at <https://ucanr.edu/site/uc-master-gardener-program-yolo-county/>

Aside from the outstanding newsletter, you'll find info about their events, outstanding webinars, and links to the demonstration gardens in our area.



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Entomosporium leaf spot fungus on evergreen pear. *Pyrus kawakami*, often called evergreen pear, is susceptible to this disease when we have rainfall in April and early



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May. There are many of these trees in downtown Davis and along parts of F Street. Expect lots of leaves to drop, but the trees will outgrow the problem.



Fireblight is a bacterial disease that attacks the same species as Entomosporium: pears and apples especially, but also hawthorn and related species. It causes rapid dieback of new shoots and damages blossoms and young fruit.



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Even species susceptible to fireblight will outgrow it once we're past the infection period. By early summer you can see the dead areas and prune them out without risk of further infection.



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Plant something new this year? How about a colorful sweet corn? Ultra Violet variety has "sweet, rich, satisfying, and nicely textured" kernels. Plant now to harvest in August!



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Gaillardia, commonly called blanket flower, is a southwestern US native that loves our hot, dry climate. The flowers are very attractive to bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Though considered summer flowering, I have found gaillardia will flower almost anytime we have sunny weather, even during winter.



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Gaillardia, commonly called blanket flower, is an easy perennial for full sun. The flowers are very attractive to bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.



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Red maids (*Calandrinia ciliata*) is a wildflower native to our area. Seed scattered in fall and watered until the rains begin will flower March through early May here.



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Tidy tips (*Layia platyglossa*) is an easy wildflower native to low-elevation, dry parts of California, including the Sacramento Valley. Scatter the seeds in fall at the start of the rainy season. Very attractive to bees, hoverflies, and hummingbirds.