

Fireblight! This bacterial disease attacks and kills the blossoms and tender growth of certain members of the apple branch of the rose family. It occurs in April and early May. Specific host plants include apples and pears, including ornamental pears; hawthorn (the tree *Crataegus*, not the India hawthorn *Raphiolepis*), and pyracantha. Contrary to what you may read on the internet, fireblight does not attack rose bushes.

The most common symptoms are blighting and death of blossoms of fruiting apples and pears, and rapid dieback of young shoots. Fireblight has a narrow temperature range of about 55 to 80 degrees, which coincides with the bloom period of those fruit trees (March to April). Bees with dirty feet spread the bacteria from bloom to bloom. Once we get above 80 degrees consistently, the bacteria stops spreading.

Fireblight is caused by a bacterium called *Erwinia amylovora*. It attacks specific members of the pome group of the rose family, particularly apples and pears, infecting through the blossoms or the young tender growth. The disease kills the flowering wood and spreads rapidly down the stem. The common name refers to the fact that it blackens the wood as it kills the shoots and branches, so the plant looks as though it has been burned.

Prune it out! Temperatures during bloom were actually lower than ideal for fireblight. But fireblight can also attack soft tender growth and cause rapid dieback. Cool conditions in the suitable infection range continued here through April and May. While our usual infection period is just a couple of weeks, some year infection can occur over a month or more. Resistant varieties that get infected will show some flagging (dieback of short shoots) before the progress of the disease stops. Susceptible varieties may lose entire branches or even be killed. Prune out fireblight as soon as you see it!



When you choose a variety of pear, it is worth considering fireblight resistance. Bartlett, the most popular commercial pear, is very susceptible; Moonglow is resistant. We get fireblight every year, and it is hard to prevent. Copper sprays during the bloom period may be helpful. It is important to prune out dead infected portions now, as those are sources of reinfection next season. They're easy to spot. Just prune down below the blackened portion into healthy wood. Dispose of the prunings in the trash rather than the compost pile. Contrary to popular literature, it is not necessary to clean your pruners with bleach as you cut.

Redwood Barn Nursery 1607 Fifth Street Davis CA 95616

Visit our website at redwoodbarn.com