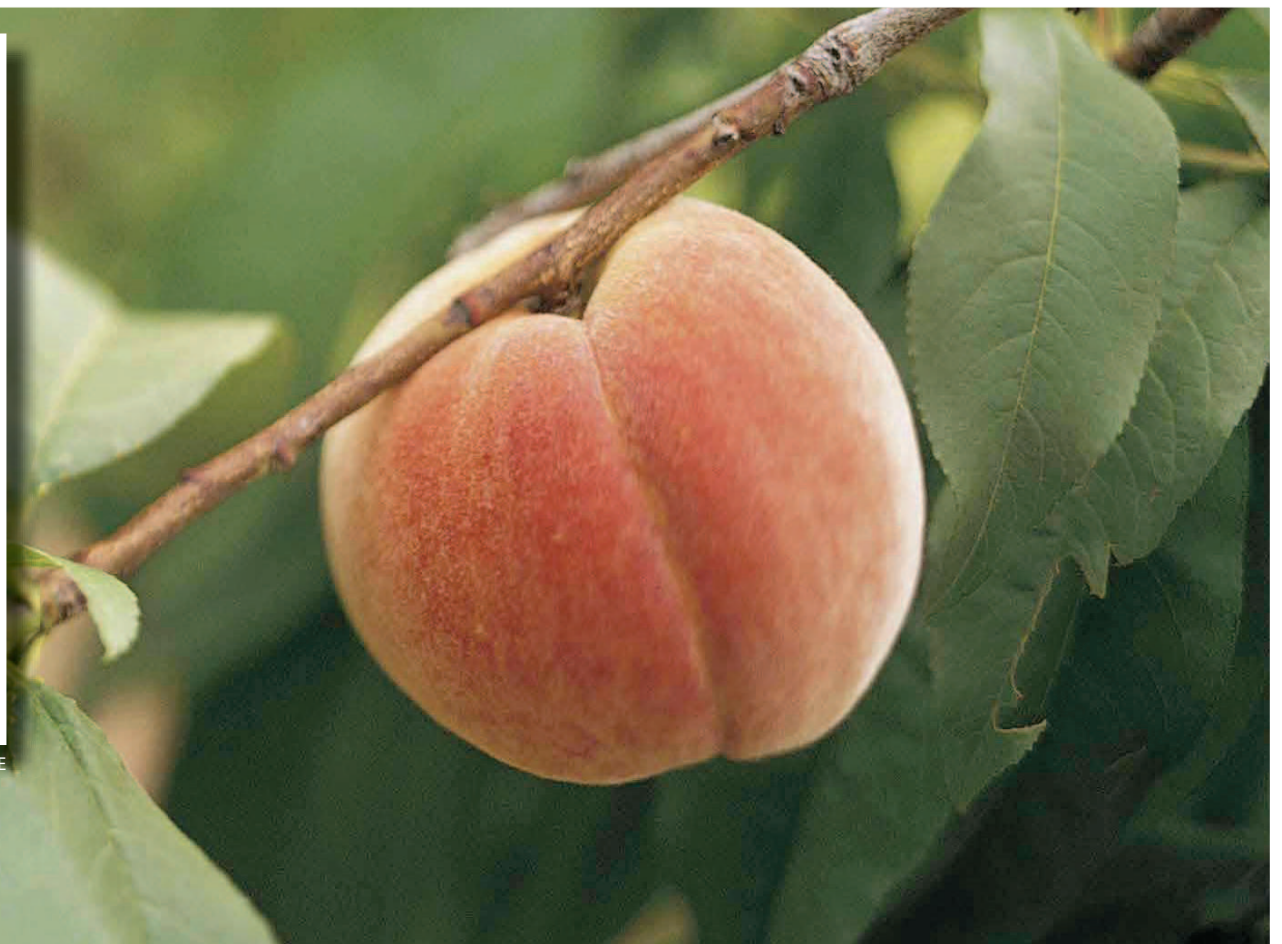




COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE EXTENSION OFFICE



THINKSTOCK

Check your trees for the peach leaf curl fungus regularly to maintain healthy peaches. Inset at left, the fungus will cause a reddish deformation and curling in the leaves of infected trees.

The wrong kind of curls

Peach leaf curl fungus turns leaves a bright reddish orange and can kill a peach tree if left untreated

LARRY SUTTON
For The News-Review

Question: We have two peach trees that had a very traumatic year. In the spring they caught something that caused the leaves to turn red, curl up and then fall off the trees. The trees did recover from whatever hit them but now they seem to be going through a similar thing with the leaves turning brown, curling up and falling off almost as if it were an early fall. As you well know, the temperatures do not indicate an early fall so is there something we can do about it or should we just curl up with our peach leaves?

Answer: Without examining the leaves from the second growth under a microscope to look for the physical evidence, I would say that this loss was a result of heat stress rather than a plant disease. Many of our trees are experiencing that today and need to have deep watering to relieve that stress.

Your peach trees are afflicted with a very common and troublesome fungus, *Taphrina deformans*. There are two approaches to avoiding the damage from the fungus. The first is to spray with a fungicide and the second is to plant varieties that are resistant to the fungus. Since your trees are already growing, it is too late for the planting resistant varieties choice. See the end of this article if you decide you want to follow that path for future peach trees in your yard.

Peach Leaf Curl has a unique appearance and is easy to identify. The leaves develop a yellow to reddish color and become

thicker and crisp in texture. As the leaves grow they become deformed, they pucker, and turn brightly red or purple. As the infection spreads twigs become distorted and the fruit may have a reddish growth on the skin. If allowed to spread unabated it will eventually infect all your current shoots, limbs, and your future blossoms, shoots and fruit. If untreated, peach leaf curl will eventually weaken your tree. Trees will die in 2 to 3 years of repeated leaf loss. While your leaves have fallen off, the fungus remains on your tree awaiting the fall and winter rains to reactivate. It has not gone away.

Once your tree has started to produce new foliage there is no spray program that will help. If the infestation is slight you can pick the affected leaves and dispose of them, but the infection will remain on the bark of the tree. To treat the problem start with good housekeeping. Rake up all the leaves from the ground and place them in a bag. Dispose of the bag in an appropriate manner.

When about 50 per cent of the leaves have fallen from your tree it is time to start your remediation program. This usually occurs in about mid-November. Then prune your tree. Pruning opens up the interior of the tree so that light and air can circulate throughout the branches. It will also have the added effect of removing some of the infected branches so that you won't have as many to treat. Early pruning gives the wounds time to heal before the winter rains have a chance to bring in other infections to your trees.

Your second step in the remediation program will be spraying your trees with a fungicide. First take the spray attachment that attaches to your garden hose and store it on the top shelf of your shop or your trash container. While the hose attachments appear to be easier to use they do not provide a consistent mixture of fungicide and water resulting in an incomplete fungicide application. If you don't already own a hand pump garden sprayer invest in one and label it fungicide. It can be deadly to your plants to accidentally use a sprayer for applying fungicides or fertilizers after it has been used to apply weed killer.

Use chlorothalonil or a fixed copper. Whenever you apply a pesticide follow the instructions on the label. The label clearly defines the usage, rate of application, toxicity and disposal. You are dealing with pesticides so wear the proper protective clothing including goggles. You will be spraying up into the trees, so be careful that the liquid will not be raining down on your head and eyes. Wear the proper protective gear so that your whole body is covered.

The fungicide spray will only be effective if you give your trees thorough coverage. Do not be conservative in your application but spray until the limbs are dripping slightly with the fungicide. The initial application applied at 50 per cent leaf fall should be followed up with additional applications in mid-January, and mid to late February, just prior to bud break. Pick days when there is no rain forecast for the next four plus days so the rain

won't wash off your hard work.

If you want to learn more about your peach trees or other fruit trees, a good reference is provided by the OSU Extension Service, "Managing Diseases and Insects in Home Orchards. It is available for download at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalogue/pdf/ec/ec631.pdf>.

When you decide to plant new peach trees or if it becomes necessary

to replace your existing trees look for varieties that are identified as leaf curl resistant. Some varieties, such as Redhaven, are listed as tolerant for other parts of the country. Unfortunately what is good for North Carolina may not be tolerant in the Pacific Northwest. Be sure that the ones you buy are tolerant for our particular climate. At the present time in Oregon, the following peach and nectarine cultivars are

listed as curl resistant: Autumn Rose, August Eter, Avalon, Avalon Pride, Charlotte, Early Charlotte, Early Crawford, Frost, Indian Free, Kriebich, Nanaimo and Oregon Curl Free.

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.