

Cytospora Canker

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Cytospora or perennial canker can be a serious problem in cherry orchards in the Mid-Columbia. It is not unusual to find parts of trees or entire trees killed by the fungus which causes this disease. In fact, in some area orchards, cytospora canker has killed significant numbers of trees.

The first noticeable symptom of this disease may be leaves wilting on a branch and the branch dying. Closer observation of the branch just below the wilted leaves will reveal a canker, or discolored area, which is the site of infection. Small branches or entire limbs may be affected.



The tissue under the canker will be brown and discolored. The surface of the canker may develop raised, pinhead-size pimples. These pimples, however, are not always clearly visible on cherry trees. Spores of this fungus disease are borne in these pimples. According to Dr. Dennis Johnson, formerly of WSU, free water such as from rain or sprinklers is needed for the release of these spores. Thus, moisture is needed for the release of spores as well as infection. In addition, Dr. Johnson found that temperatures ranging from 35° - 90°F were conducive for the release of the spores.

Pruning and other type wounds (S.W. injury, tractor wounds, etc.) are the most important avenues of infection. Pruning wounds, however, were found to lose their susceptibility to the infection within 3 days. Infection took place most readily in June and July when temperatures were warmer while infection was most difficult to obtain during the coldest months of December and January. I do not believe, however, that this data suggests that summer pruning is a bad idea. Since infection takes place only when there is free water present, it still makes sense to prune during the dry months of summer. In any event, it is not wise to prune in the rain. Also, avoid irrigation shortly after pruning.

We do not have any chemicals that will successfully control this disease. The best control is through sanitation practices. Clean up infected trees first. Flag infected trees during the summer when wilted or dead branches are easy to see. Cut well below a canker, not into one since this will only spread the disease. Only after this is done should you finish the rest of the block. It is also important to remove pruned wood from the orchard since this fungus will continue to grow on dead wood after it is pruned out of the tree and will then re-infect healthy wood.