

# Fire Blight

## A Bacterial Disease of Apple, Crabapple, and Pear Trees

Fire blight is a destructive bacterial disease of apples, crab apples and pear trees, as well as other related plants such as cotoneaster shrubs and mountain ash. Warm rainy springs and open wounds allow rapid spread of the disease. Fire blight is most severe before and during bloom when spring temperatures are warmer than average. Fire blight can destroy the blossoms, fruit, and stems of the plant, and even kill the plant.

## Treatment Options are Limited for Infected Trees

Fire blight is difficult to treat effectively, because the bacteria live in the wood of the tree and are inaccessible through externally applied treatments. Trees infected with fire blight should be kept under close monitoring, as the disease can flare up suddenly. Even in best-case scenarios, fire blight can only be suppressed but not controlled.

## What to Look For

- Disease attacks all above ground parts of the tree.
- Leaves blacken and curl, giving a fire-scorched appearance.
- Infected branches blacken and curl into a “shepherds crook”.
- Small to large cankers form on the branches and trunk.
- Succulent growth turns to a brown or black color and wilts.
- Lesions forming on fruit.

## Life Cycle

- Bacteria travels through branches into the main stem and causes cankers.
- Disease overwinters in old cankers.
- In Spring, bacteria oozes out from cankers and is spread by insects and rain to nearby trees.
- New infection points are blossoms, fresh wounds or natural openings.

## Treatment and Prevention

- Select varieties of trees that are less susceptible to fire blight.
- Reduce stress on plants through proper watering and mulching.
- Reduce growth rate with application of Cambistat™ Growth Regulator.
- Limit pruning to reasonable doses to reduce sprouting.
- Remove all cankers and diseased branches.
  - Sanitize pruning equipment between each cut.



Branches blacken and curl into a “shepherds crook”.



Disease overwinters in old cankers and spreads in spring.