THE Natural GARDENER

Fire Blight

Fire Blight is a bacterial disease (*Erwinia amylovora)* that can affect plants in the Rose Family, especially Pears, but also Roses, Apples, Quince, Pyracantha, Spiraea, Cotoneaster, Photinia, and Loquat. Symptoms show up within a couple of weeks after bloom. The growing tips die, turning brown to black, looking as if they've been burned by fire. The dead tips wilt, forming a very typical "shepherd's crook" symptom. If fire blight is left untreated, it can kill the plant. With the following management practices, however, a fire-blight infected plant can be saved if caught in time. It is important to diagnose correctly and treat the plant as soon as possible.

1. Avoid over-fertilizing or heavily pruning susceptible plants, especially pears. Fast, succulent growth, often produced by heavy pruning and high nitrogen fertilizers, is more susceptible to fire blight.
2. Prune out diseased branches at least 8 to 12 inches below the visible injury or canker. A greater distance below infections may be required on major branches, scaffolds, or trunks in May or June, when blight bacteria are spreading rapidly.
3. The most ideal time to prevent and treat fire blight is to begin just before blooms open, spraying **Actinovate** every 7 – 14 days until blooming has finished. Mix 1 – 2 tsp. Actinovate per gallon on diseased trees; ½ - 1 tsp. per gallon as prevention. If disease symptoms are noticed after blooming has finished, prune as above and spray at the stronger rate once. Watch for further symptoms and spot treat as needed.
4. Dip or spray the pruning tool between every cut with a 10% solution of bleach (one part bleach to nine parts water). Dry and oil tools after use to prevent rust. Burn trimmings or discard in trash. Avoid touching healthy tissue with infected tissue.

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