

# What's wrong with my peach tree?

Homeowners are noticing the leaves on peach trees are not looking quite like they should. A fungal disease, peach-leaf curl, can be identified early in the year, when leaves first emerge.

Young leaves are arched and reddened, or paler than normal as they emerge. They then become curled, puckered, and distorted. Any portion of the entire leaf may be curled, and one or all leaves from a bud. Leaves may drop if infection is severe, therefore, lowering vitality of the tree. Defoliation for several seasons will kill trees.

The source of infection is from ascospores of conidia formed during the growing season and lodged on the buds, tree limbs or branches. The spores remain in these locations during the summer, fall and winter and infect new leaves the following spring.

The disease is easy to control with one dormant season spray of a fungicide such as a Bordeaux mix or Ferbam. This is best applied just before the buds swell (end of February in Baxter County), but can be done any time after leaf fall, as long as the temperature is above freezing. Applications after buds swell have little effect, so it is imperative not to wait too long.

Unfortunately, there is nothing that can be done this year as the fungus doesn't have a summer stage. The plants will eventually grow out of this. To maintain vigor where leaf curl is severe:

- ✓ Thin fruit heavily to reduce the demand on the remaining leaves.
- ✓ Reduce drought stress by periodic irrigation.
- ✓ Apply a nitrogen fertilizer. Carefully control the amount of fertilizer so that the trees are not over-stimulated.

For information on peach-leaf curl, call University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension office at 425-2335.



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