



Dormant Spraying

By Kathy Ruiz

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

There's no time like the fall season to start thinking about dormant spraying for fruit trees. Dormant sprays help reduce the presence of overwintering insects and diseases. The rule of thumb has always been to spray three times during the dormant season and to time your spraying at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Valentine's Day. However, sometimes that's just not possible because the weather is too windy, too wet, too hot or too cold. So if that's the case this season, and you have trouble getting the trees sprayed twice or thrice, try to spray as close to bud break as possible, preferably as flower buds begin to swell but before those green leaf tips are visible. Spraying after winter pruning is complete will reduce the tree surface area requiring spraying. This should reduce the amount of spray product needed as well as your exposure to the spray.

Dormant or horticultural oil and fungicide sprays can be found at nurseries and garden centers. Oil works by smothering insects and their eggs and controls the likes of aphids, mites, leaf rollers and other caterpillars. The standard for controlling peach leaf curl, fire blight and other tree fungi has always been a spray containing copper. Currently, the only copper products available to the home orchardist are ones containing a copper ammonium complex and copper octanoate, also known as copper soap. Their effectiveness can be improved by adding horticultural oil or a sticker or spreader to the fungicide mixture to help the spray adhere to the tree surface. The synthetic fungicide chlorothalonil is the only non-copper fungicide available for managing peach leaf curl on backyard trees. Always read and follow the label directions on any pesticide product carefully and heed any restrictions.

The weather and timing for spraying are crucial. Spraying when temperatures are below 35 degrees can damage the tree bark and the spray will take longer to dry, likewise, avoid spraying if the temperature will rise above 85 degrees. Rain and dormant spraying don't mix, so it is best to find a 48-hour window when there will be no rain or fog in the forecast. Do not spray when it is windy.

Protect yourself when you spray. Wear a hat, gloves and a face shield to ensure eye protection and lessen exposure to chemicals. After spraying, wash your clothes and take a bath or shower.

Dormant spraying may seem like a lot of work, but helping your fruit trees fend off pests and diseases will reward you with healthy trees and more fruit come spring and summer.

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There is no UCCE Master Gardener class scheduled for this Saturday. UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/ and <http://www.facebook.com/pages/El-Dorado-County-Master-Gardeners/164653119129>.