

**COASTAL GARDENER**  
**Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.**

**Q:** How can I control leaf curl in my peach tree?

**A:** Leaf curl in peaches and nectarines is caused by a fungus. During the spring when leaves begin to grow, this fungus produces spores which infect the new leaves and young twigs. Infected leaves usually fall from the tree in late spring, however, the twig infections persist, and this is where the fungus survives from year to year. Therefore, to control leaf curl, your tree must be sprayed now (January/early February) with a dormant spray of copper sulfate or calcium polysulfide. Usually one thorough spray is enough for good disease control. Make sure all twigs, branches, and the trunk are completely covered. If leaf curl disease was severe last season, you should apply a second spray of chlorothalonil at the time when the leaf buds show a little green tissue (green tip stage). This green tip spray also requires thorough coverage of all parts of the tree.

The copper sulfate or calcium polysulfide sprays for leaf curl will only help on peaches and nectarines. If other trees (apples, apricots, plums, pears, citrus) in your garden have had leaf curl, the above materials do not provide a cure. Leaf curl in these five fruit varieties is usually caused by aphids. Therefore, apples, apricots, plums, citrus and pear trees should now be given a dormant oil spray. The dormant oil will help kill eggs, larva and pupae of aphids and other insects that survive the winter on the tree. Again complete, thorough coverage of the tree is essential to getting good control.

These dormant sprays need to be an annual cultural practice if you wish to keep your fruit trees relatively free of leaf curl caused by the fungus or by insects. Use all plant protection products according to label directions for best results.

**Author's notes:** I should state here that leaf curl in fruit or ornamental trees can have several other causes besides fungus and insects. Insufficient water can cause leaf curl as the tree reacts to drought stress. Have you used "Weed and Feed" products on your lawn? The herbicide in "Weed and Feed" compounds can be the cause of leaf curl if the tree roots absorb some of the material. Be cautious with "Weed and

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Feed” compounds if your trees are in or at the edge of a lawn area. Salty air or salty soil (soil high in some mineral salts) can also cause leaves to curl in sensitive plants.

As you can see, the causes of leaf curl can be several. Therefore, diagnosis of the cause of the leaf curl is important to successful remediation.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**