

Coastal Gardener Column

Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.

June 11, 2007

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- Q:** My neighbor has a palm tree, which has many dead fronds still attached. The January frost also did some damage, so now there are more partially dead fronds. We have had rats in the neighborhood and suspect this tree may be providing refuge. Is there anything we can do, as concerned neighbors, to encourage removal of the spent fronds? Does the city or the county have a palm frond removal program?
- A:** If the palm tree in question is a “street tree,” i.e., planted at or near the street curb, you can contact the city and discuss the problem with them. They may have crews that will perform maintenance work on a “street tree.” If, however, the tree is in the front- or backyard, i.e., growing on private property, the care and maintenance of the tree is the responsibility of the property owner. You and your neighbors can contact the offending tree owner and suggest that the tree be trimmed. You might even suggest sharing the expense of a trimming. This might be the “carrot” that will initiate some action!
- If the tree is trimmed and there are rats present, be prepared to set traps or bait for rat control, as the rats will be seeking other places to take up residence!
- Q:** I have a nectarine tree that has leaf curl. I cannot spray my tree with the suggested spray (copper or calcium polysulfide) because it is not January. The tree already has fruit. Is there anything that can be done at this stage (June) to get rid of the insects and/or leaf curl?
- A:** In a word, NO! Leaf curl in nectarines and peaches is caused by a fungus or an insect. The fungus survives on the tree in the form of small lesions on buds and twigs. During rainy and damp weather in the spring, these lesions become active and liberate spores, which infect leaves as they emerge from buds. The recommended dormant spray of copper or calcium polysulfide is to eradicate the fungus from the bud and twig lesions. If you miss the dormant spray, you have another chance at disease suppression in the spring as the young leaves begin to emerge. The time is called the “green tip” stage as only about a quarter inch of new leaf is showing from the buds when the fungicide chlorothalonil (Daconil™) should be applied. The green tip spray protects the new leaves

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from infection by the fungus spores. It does, however, not eradicate the twig lesions. This is why a dormant spray each year in December or January is so important.

Insect-caused leaf curl has a similar incidence profile. Most insect-caused leaf curl in peaches, nectarines, plums, apricots, cherries, apples, and pears is caused by aphids. The aphids overwinter as eggs or mature adults on the host tree. In spring, warming temperatures cause the eggs to hatch or allow adult activity. The aphids then start feeding on young emerging leaves. The feeding activity on the young leaves causes the leaves to curl.

In both the fungus- and aphid-caused leaf curl, once the leaves are damaged, they cannot be returned to normal. To spray the tree now is a waste of time and chemicals. I suggest you mark your events calendar now to “apply dormant spray” during the last week of December. Apply copper or calcium polysulfide for fungus control and dormant oil for insect control. These chemicals can be mixed and applied at the same time. Read the package label for dosage and compatibility information. Apply all plant protection products according to label directions.

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