

### COASTAL GARDENER COLUMN

**Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.**

**Q:** When should I spray my peach tree to control leaf curl disease?

**A:** I assume from your question that you did not use a dormant copper or calcium polysulfide spray during the winter (Dec-Jan). Ideally, the dormant period is the best time to spray for leaf curl control.

At this point, you have one last chance to suppress leaf curl disease in your peach or nectarine tree. Purchase some chlorothalonil (Daconil™) and apply it now. Ideally, the tree(s) should be sprayed with chlorothalonil at the “green tip” stage, i.e., when the leaf buds are just emerging and the new leaves are about ½ inch long. Chlorothalonil is a contact fungicide, so make sure you get complete coverage of all the twigs and branches and leaves of the tree.

The fungus that causes leaf curl survives year to year in tiny infection sites mainly on twigs and small branches. For this reason, the dormant spray is most effective. The chlorothalonil spray now helps suppress spore release from the twig lesions and it also helps protect the emerging new foliage from infection.

You have one other factor in your favor this year. The spring of 2007 has been very dry, so the leaf curl fungus may not be very active this year. However, if your tree(s) is wetted by sprinklers, the fungus will most likely still be active.

**Q:** I think I have nematodes in my landscape and garden area. What can I do to suppress/control these pests?

**A:** For the uninitiated, nematodes are a non-segmented worm. Nematodes are found worldwide. Some are several feet long, but most species are microscopic in size. Most are free-living in soil and feed on bacteria and other small organisms. The species of most concern to the gardener are those that feed on the roots of plants. On the Central Coast

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there are several species of plant feeders – rootknot and cyst nematodes being the most common.

Plant feeding nematodes like to live in light, sandy soils where there is lots of pore space between the soil particles in which to move around. In the urban area of Santa Maria, I have found rootknot nematode to be the most common problem. If you have areas in your yard/garden where plants are chronically in poor health, showing stunted growth and symptoms of nutrient deficiencies, nematodes could be the cause. To attempt a diagnosis, carefully dig up a few of the plants that are growing poorly. Do not pull the plants out of the ground. Then dip the root system in a bucket of water and carefully wash the soil from the roots. If rootknot nematodes are present, there will be beads, galls, “knots” on the roots. Normal roots should be slender without the above abnormalities.

There are few options for nematode control. One is to incorporate large quantities of organic matter into the soil. The organic matter encourages nematode predators and parasites to help reduce the population of plant feeding nematodes. Another control is to use nematode-resistant plants. Third, grow a variety of plants and rotate plantings so you do not plant the same plants in the same place each year. Finally, the use of garden products that contain disyston may help keep nematode populations suppressed.

Nematode populations are difficult to control in the home garden. Keeping them suppressed so that you can grow reasonably healthy plants is usually the best you can hope for.

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