

**COASTAL GARDENER**  
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**Q:** A number of trees and shrubs have died in my yard. The problem has been diagnosed as *Armillaria* root rot. What can I do to control this disease?

**A:** In a yard and home landscape situation your alternatives are very limited. In commercial situations several fumigant materials can be used to suppress *Armillaria mellea* infected sites. However, none of these materials are registered for use in residential landscape situations. Therefore, the alternatives for managing *Armillaria* root rot are to change the landscape planting to immune and resistant species and to alter the management of the landscape to put the *Armillaria* at a disadvantage. The cultural management of the landscape is important. I recently talked with an *Armillaria* expert from UC Davis, and he informed me that even so-called immune/resistant plants can succumb to *Armillaria* if they are grown under high moisture conditions during the summer and fall growing season.

There are a number of *Armillaria* hot spots in the Santa Maria/Orcutt area. I have also diagnosed *Armillaria* root rot in Vandenberg Village, Lompoc, and Goleta. I suspect that every other community on the Central Coast also has *Armillaria* hot spots, but homeowners have not figured out what is killing their plants or they already have landscapes which accommodate the problem.

*Armillaria mellea* has a wide host range including many woody and herbaceous plants. Therefore, if you have a landscape planting in which a variety of shrubs and trees are dying, you should suspect *Armillaria mellea* as a possible cause. Fortunately, the fungus is soilborne and generally moves (the margins of the infected site) very slowly creating an ever larger infected zone.

To stop or at least dramatically slow the progress of *Armillaria*, the landscape should be converted to a Mediterranean type, i.e., winter/spring wet (rain or irrigation) and summer/fall dry (little or no irrigation). A Mediterranean garden should be planted in the fall so the plants can become established during the winter and spring before the water is turned off. Turf grass and high water use plants will not be part of this landscape.

Many Central Coast landscapers can design such a landscape for you. Also contact the Coastal Gardener if you wish more information on *Armillaria mellea* and/or lists of plants recommended for dry/drought-resistant landscapes.

Author's Note: Many insects and disease organisms and other pests, for example, earwigs, slugs and snails, crickets, sowbugs, leaf infecting fungi, and many worms survive the winter in a quiescent state in plant debris on the soil surface under trees and shrubs. A general garden cleanup is a good way to eliminate or at least reduce these problems. Rake up and remove dead leaves and other plant debris. A light cultivation to disturb the soil surface will destroy many hiding places and expose eggs, larva and pupa to foraging birds and other predators. Prune trees and shrubs to remove dead and especially diseased twigs and branches. In mid-winter (Dec – Jan) spray trees and shrubs with a “clean-up” spray of dormant oil (deciduous plants) and copper or summer oil (evergreen plants), and copper to destroy overwintering insect eggs, aphids, scale, mealybugs, leaf curl fungus, and other pests that survive up on the plants.

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