

ORNAMENTAL PEAR RUST FUNGUS

Over the last several seasons hundreds of leaf samples from ornamental pear trees have been evaluated by our staff. Wet, cold spring weather results in severe pear rust fungus damage—warm, dry spring weather results in lower disease involvement. The symptoms closely resemble Cedar Apple Rust so common on flowering crabs and fruit producing apple trees.

This relatively new rust that is affecting the ornamental pears, too, has an alternate host of a juniper bush or tree in the disease life cycle. Trying to control the disease by treating the junipers is not practical—there are thousands of junipers and Eastern Red Cedar trees on road sides, pastures, and undeveloped sites in Douglas County alone.

The first sign of Pear Tree Rust Fungus are the small but very visible bright orange leaf spots on the surface of the pear tree leaf. A closer inspection will reveal typical rust fungal growths on the underside of the leaves. These rust fungus leaf spots house the spores which are easily spread in the wind. The infection will not, by itself, kill a pear tree. It will however weaken the tree for the current and following year. After having its feed upon your pear tree, the fungus will move on via spore transportation in late summer, but this time to a juniper tree or shrub. This is where the fungus will spend the winter. In the spring following periods of high humidity and rainfall, the hard fungus growths on the cedar or evergreen enlarge into orange, horn-like outgrowths that produce airborne spores that attach to the immature flowering pear leaves.

Any newly installed pear tree or any tree under stress from over watering, growing in heavy compacted clay soils, mechanical or winter injury, storm damaged, or stressed from weather conditions are more likely to be affected by this fungus.

Preventative fungicides Fertilome Liquid Systemic Fungicide (1/2 Tbs per gallon), or Fertilome F-Stop (2 Tbs per gallon). These are registered for homeowner application. Lanoha Nurseries Garden Center has all of these fungicides available.

Application timing can be a bit tricky! Begin spraying when the junipers start producing the orange spore horns. You may not have access to such observation of a juniper—use instead the flowering crabs in the neighborhood. When they begin to show color, start the fungicide control spray applications. Continue to spray every 7 days until the juniper galls become dry and cease to produce viable spores. In wet cool spring this could be 4-6 sprays. If the spring is dry and warm, 2 or 3 sprays may be sufficient.

Juniper Gall:

