



Treatments Save Crabapple Trees

by Laura Smies, Arborist
Autumn Tree Care

Cool, wet weather, as we experienced last spring, can be very destructive to flowering crabapple trees—especially larger, susceptible varieties. The rainy weather provided a favorable environment for the "apple scab leaf fungus" that grows in nearly all landscapes with flowering crab trees. With spring just a month away, a prudent course of action is to monitor precipitation and stay alert to the possibility of apple scab.

Once infected with the fungus, flowering crabs require timely treatments to prevent early defoliation and loss. Apple scab begins at bud break and requires three consecutive fungicide applications. If the first treatment is missed, applications should be immediately scheduled for the following season.

Proper diagnosis requires an onsite examination of the flower cluster leaves, since they are the first to be exposed as the buds open. By mid-summer, blotchy

brown areas on the leaves become evident, making trees look wilted and sick (see photo). Early defoliation is the most common sign.

Defoliation weakens the tree, and the effects can be life-threatening if treatment is not administered and a tree is infected year after year. Mid-summer leaf loss compromises the tree's ability to produce food and store it over the winter. The problem becomes even more complicated when infected trees expend a second flush of leaves, further depleting their energy.

Horticulture to the rescue

Proactively planting apple scab-resistant trees is one solution. A list of genetically tolerant and resistant crabapple trees is available through reputable nurseries, tree care companies, the Chicago Botanical Gardens and the Morton Arboretum. These lists specify crabapple varieties that are not susceptible to *Venturia inaequalis*, the fungus that causes apple scab. Thus, they will not require the timely fungicide treatments as part of their plant healthcare.

Solutions for infected trees are available through ISA-member tree care companies. Fungicidal treatments, applied by licensed professionals, are highly effective. Furthermore, pruning and fertilization are critical measures for building a tree's natural defenses.

Using a licensed applicator ensures safety to the family, community and environment. It also assures quality, because the applications should be finely misted over the trees, which is best accomplished by a professional.

Never too late

Heavy apple scab infections, season after season, can result in the loss of a tree. If you have spotted early defoliation in previous years, you should sign up for treatment immediately. Even though a specimen may look healthy now, the tree is almost surely infected. Starting with a fertilization program this year can minimize damage and build necessary food reserves for next winter.

