

## MANAGING CITRUS CANKER IN THE BACKYARD

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As many backyard citrus growers know, citrus canker has been in our area for several years. While the effort to totally eradicate this bacterial disease has been suspended, gardeners can still work to prevent and manage citrus canker to keep their oranges, tangerines, grapefruit, lemons, limes, and other citrus acceptably attractive and productive.

Our office receives a fair amount of specimens and calls that have turned out to be citrus canker. Proper identification is always the first order of business in managing citrus canker in your backyard. Our office can help you with this task. Please make sure to either send me a good digital photo at [ralph.mitchell@charlottefl.com](mailto:ralph.mitchell@charlottefl.com) or bring in a sample to our office sealed in two clear plastic zip-top baggies. Once diagnosed, we can then offer some helpful advice on keeping citrus canker under control.

What does citrus canker look like? It can be mistaken for several other diseases such as scab, melanose, and Alternaria brown spot. However, citrus canker is different and best described as small, slightly raised blister-like spots. Changing from tan to brown in color, a yellow circle or halo appears around the spots. The center of these spots is actually visible on both sides of the leaf and

becomes corky in texture with time. Sometimes old canker spots fall out leaving holes.

Canker is most apt to attack new leaves as the tissue is tender and easy to penetrate. However, even more mature and hardened citrus tissue can be compromised by wounding such as might occur during pruning. Canker infection often occurs in wind-driven rain. In fact, the literature indicates that a single drop of rain can carry millions of canker bacteria. People can also spread canker through moving infected plant materials, on contaminated tools and even on their clothing. Hurricanes, of course, can really move citrus canker around.

Citrus canker bacteria enter a leaf through an opening such as a pore or a wound. The tunneling caused by citrus leafminers is also linked to providing bacteria with easy to enter open wounds. As citrus canker does not spread through the plant internally, the disease is restricted to the visible spots and lesions characteristic to this disease.

While leaves are very easily infected by citrus canker, stems and twigs tend to be more resistant. Cankers on stems and twigs appear as raised, corky, scabby areas. Canker infections on fruit ap-

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photo courtesy of <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

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pear brown and raised and are sometimes surrounded by a yellow halo. Infected fruits are scabby looking and may drop prematurely. Keep in mind however, that although the fruit looks bad, it is still fully edible.

So you find out that your trees do have citrus canker – this is not necessarily the end of the world! While we can't cure a canker spot, we can limit its spread. For instance, if it is very limited to only one area on the tree, you may be able to prune off the affected portion. By removing this infected plant material, you remove potential future sources of the disease. Seal the infected material in two plastic bags and dispose of it in the trash – do not compost it or put it out as yard waste. Composting will not guarantee the destruction of this disease. The latest research indicates that copper-based fungicides can protect against citrus canker infections. However, it has only a temporary affect as a barrier and coating and it works only as long as this coating is

intact. Therefore, it is not recommended that homeowners try to control citrus canker chemically as it is, at best, difficult, expensive, not very efficient and even potentially environmentally hazardous.

Prevention of citrus canker is always the best strategy. Disinfect tools by carefully using such materials as hydrogen peroxide, rubbing alcohol or chlorine bleach as per label instructions and with every normal precaution. Also, only purchase citrus trees with a registration tag indicating that it came from a certified nursery.

Citrus canker is not good, but with some carefully management, we can keep it at bay and under some degree of control.

Resource:

Spann T.M., Atwood R.A., Yates J.D., & Graham Jr J.H. (2008) *Dooryard Citrus Production: Citrus Canker Disease*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

For more information on other types of citrus problems and solutions, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte.

MONTHLY PLANT CLINICS ARE SATURDAYS FROM 9:00AM-12:00PM.

- **Powell's Nursery** ..... 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of month
- **Peachland Publix**..... 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of month
- **Home Depot (Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte, Englewood)** ..... 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of month
- **Lowes** ..... 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of month

PLANT CLINICS AVAILABLE ACROSS THE COUNTY:

- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Punta Gorda Library** 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of month from 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** (13577 Blake Drive, PC) 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of month from 9:00am-12:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell ([Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com](mailto:Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com)) is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County Extension Service. Contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email ([Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com)).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.