

Fire blight

What is Fire blight?

Fire blight (*Erwinia amylovora*) is a devastating bacterial disease that mainly infects apple and pear trees. Currently, there are no effective chemical controls available where this pest is present.

What does it look like?

Fire blight gets its name from the burnt appearance of affected plants. Symptoms of Fire blight infection can vary between cultivars, but infection generally affects all part of the tree including blossoms, leaves, shoots, branches, fruits and roots.

New shoots and leaves appear glassy and water soaked with an off-green colouring before turning brown or black. Reddish brown streaks can appear in the sap wood beneath the bark.

What can it be confused with?

Fire blight may be confused with a number of other bacterial or fungal disease symptoms, as well as damage resulting from insect attack or frosts. The presence of bacterial ooze seeping out of cankers is an identifying feature of Fire blight and will distinguish it from these other pests.

What should I look for?

Shoots and branches bent into a 'shepherd's crook' shape or the development of a bacterial ooze are key symptoms to be looked for.

Other symptoms that can be detected following Fire blight infection include water soaked and dark sunken cankers, dry twigs, dead branches that appear a burnt or deep rust colour, and dead leaves that remain on the tree. Blossoms and fruitlets may also develop a dark brown to black blight.



Infected trees have a rusty, burnt appearance

Jody Feizer, New York Botanical Garden, Bugwood.org



Branches appear burned and then die

William Jacobi, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org



Dark sunken cankers appear on branches

William Jacobi, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org



How does it spread?

Within an orchard, heavy rain, birds, insects, animals and plants rubbing against each other can spread the pest. The bacteria can spread larger distances on infected plant material or on personnel and equipment that has been in contact with infected plant material.

Where is it now?

Fire blight is a major problem in Europe, Asia, Egypt, Bermuda, Canada, Mexico, USA and New Zealand.

How can I protect my orchard from Fire blight?

Source plant material only from clean, accredited suppliers, and preferably material that is certified. Check your orchard frequently for the presence of new pests and unusual symptoms. Make sure you are familiar with common pome fruit pests so you can tell if you see something different. Any bacterial ooze on pome trees or fruit should be checked out.

If you see anything unusual, call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline

**EXOTIC PLANT PEST HOTLINE
1800 084 881**



Typical 'shepherd's crook' bending of shoots

A.L. Jones, Michigan State University



Translucent liquid containing bacteria oozes from infected fruit

A.L. Jones, Michigan State University



Young leaves appear glassy and water soaked before turning black

Mary Ann Hansen, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Bugwood.org