

Q. Last year my peach trees had a terrible case of peach leaf curl, and the fruit got brown rot as well. When should I spray them and with what so that I can harvest edible fruit this year?

A. The fungus that causes Peach Leaf curl overwinters on the branches and dormant buds of peach and nectarine trees, and is very common in this area. If you had a serious case last year, you can be sure that dormant spores are just waiting for spring to attack the new leaves. *Taphrina deformans* is the name of this nasty fungus, which causes new leaves to become twisted, thickened and discolored. It can attack the fruit also. You need to spray with fixed copper or Bordeaux solution, and the recommended times are now and again in late winter before the buds start to swell. When you spray be sure to wear eye-protection and proper safety gear and use a dedicated sprayer. Both fixed copper and Bordeaux sprays can be used in organic gardens, but you should always take care to follow the safety instructions and to keep pesticides away from children and pets.

Brown rot is caused by a *Monilinia* spp. Infected blossoms turn brown and wither, clinging to the stems. Sometimes the fungus moves into twigs, causing leaves to shrivel. Velvety gray or tan tufts of spores are formed on diseased blossoms or twig cankers. When it appears on fruit, brown or tan spots spread rapidly over the surface and produce spores. Your first job is to remove and destroy any mummified fruit hanging on the tree, as it is a rot reservoir. Prune the trees carefully; removing infected wood and increasing air-flow. Fixed copper sprays are used when the trees are at pink-bud stage. Do not use copper sprays after the blooms have opened.