

Q: How can I prevent brown rot from ruining my peaches and nectarines this year?

A: We have had so much rain this year that brown rot is going to be a big problem for many backyard orchards. Brown rot, (*Monilinia spp.*), are very destructive fungi, that can destroy more than 50% of the fruit from peaches, pears, apples, nectarines and plums prior to harvest.

The first visible symptom is the shriveling of blossoms. Often droplets of clear-amber sap appear where the infected twig attaches to the stem. If weather remain wet and humid, gray fungal masses may appear on the dead blossoms. Infected twigs have cankers with brown margins that appear on the surface. Twig lesions apparently do not produce spores

Young fruit is not usually susceptible to brown rot unless it is damaged in some way, giving the spores access to the interior of the fruit. Once the fruit ripens and becomes soft, it is more easily infected, especially under warm, moist and humid conditions. In severe infections, an entire crop of fruit can be destroyed in just a few days. If the fruit is infected, small soft brown circles appear, gradually spreading over the entire surface. The fruit eventually shrivels up (becomes mummified) and is covered by a grayish coat of spores.

*Monilinia spp.* overwinters on mummified fruit that either falls to the ground or remains in the trees. In spring, ascospores are released from the fallen mummies at the same time as the trees bloom, the primary source of infection.

The first line of defense is to meticulously pick up all fallen fruit from the ground and from the tree. Bag and remove from your yard; compost only if you have a hot compost pile. In the dormant season, prune off all cankered twigs.

By April your trees have bloomed, and if mummified fruits were in your yard, the blossoms are likely to be infected. Prune off any infected blossoms, carefully removing the twigs from the garden. Several fungicides are registered for use on peaches and nectarines. For currently registered products and for more information on brown rot, look under peaches on the UC IPM Web site at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG>.