



CANKERS

Host Plants and Description

Cankers are most frequently seen on trees and shrubs, but they can occur on annuals and perennials as well. They are dead areas of plant tissue caused by fungi or bacteria, injury, or environmental stress. These areas are usually brown or black and sunken and sometimes they bleed sap.

Plant Damage and Symptoms

On trees, cankers will typically appear on the trunks or older branches, or on smaller twigs that have been injured. On perennials and annuals, cankers generally will appear on the stems. When conditions are right, cankers can girdle branches, stems, twigs or trunks, eventually causing wilting or death of the affected area or the whole plant.

Generally, the first symptoms are wilting, yellowing and browning of the youngest leaves. Affected twigs may curl downwards. Sometimes just one side of a branch is girdled, causing a one-sided dieback. Although cankers sometimes cause death of the entire plant, this is a very slow process, usually taking months or even years to kill a tree.

Controls

Keeping plants in optimal health will help to prevent cankers. Choose plants that are hardy to the area and provide the conditions that they need through proper spacing, fertilizing and watering. Plant at the proper depth and avoid physical injury from lawn mowers, string trimmers, etc.

Cankers on the trunks of trees may be left alone, or they may be cut out. If pruning out, remove as much of the dead tissue as possible. Cut out any cankers that look as though they will girdle stems, and remove infected wood from the site. Disinfect pruning tools with bleach or an alcohol solution between cuts. Prune when the plant surfaces are dry to minimize the spread of the disease. Cut out affected branches well below the infected area, and cut to just above a node at a slant. Do not leave large stubs as these will probably die back and may provide sites for new infection.