

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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You may have noticed that many crabapple trees are losing their leaves and are beginning to look quite bare. It is not unusual for this to occur in most years but the severity of it this year seems to be more than in past years. I did a search on ISU's Extension's website and came across this article written by Christine Engelbrecht, Plant Pathologist with Iowa State University Extension that helps to explain what is going on. I thought you might be interested in her explanation of what is happening this year. The following is an edited version of what Christine wrote.

What causes these attractive trees to drop their leaves mid-summer? The answer is a fungal disease called apple scab.

A fungus called *Venturia inaequalis* infects crabapple leaves early in the spring. As the fungus grows in the developing leaves, it causes purplish-brown spots, often clustered along the leaf veins. The spots can grow up to a half inch in diameter, with feathery margins when young and more distinct margins as they mature. Most people don't notice the disease, though, until these infected leaves turn yellow and fall off the tree.

The apple scab fungus spends the winter in the fallen leaves, and in the spring it produces spores that can infect the new crop of leaves. Besides crabapple, the disease also affects apple, pear, hawthorn and mountain ash.

Why do some crabapple trees get hit with scab every year, while others seem to be unharmed most years? Crabapple cultivars vary greatly in their ability to fend off the apple scab fungus. Some popular cultivars, such as "Spring Snow", are very susceptible to apple scab and lose their leaves nearly every year. Other cultivars, such as "Prairifire" are resistant. Even a resistant variety can get apple scab if the weather is very favorable for disease but in most years it will be disease-free.

We see apple scab every year, but this year the disease has been especially severe in much of Iowa, causing defoliation earlier than usual and causing more severe leaf drop. Apple scab is favored by cool, wet weather in the spring, when the fungus infects the new leaves. Because this spring's weather was so favorable, some resistant trees that haven't had apple scab for years are dropping leaves this year.

Apple scab does not kill crabapples and usually does not seriously hurt them. What can be done to manage apple scab? First, choose a resistant cultivar when planting a new crabapple tree.

Since the apple scab fungus survives the winter in fallen leaves, raking up and destroying those leaves at the end of the season can help to minimize problems next year. Keeping trees well spaced and pruned to promote airflow through the canopy can also help. Sometimes fungicide sprays are used to prevent infection of susceptible cultivars in the spring. However, the sprays must be repeated, and they are ineffective once symptoms appear.

For more information, contact the Grundy Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.