

Silver Leaf

This is a very serious fungal disease affecting all species of top fruit, but particularly stone fruits. Spores can enter through wounds such as pruning cuts at any time of year, however it is in the autumn and winter when the fungus produces the majority of its spores that infection is more likely. During the summer months of June, July and August spore numbers are at their lowest making this the safest time to prune stone fruits. This is also the time when pruning wounds heal more quickly.



DAMAGE

Silver Leaf causes dieback of a tree, branch by branch. Leaves appear silvery and a brown stain is produced in the inner tissue. The silvery leaves themselves are not infectious; their abnormal appearance is caused by toxins produced by the fungus in the wood of stems and branches.

Often the fungus is not visible on the exterior, even on trees showing pronounced silvering. However, as the infected branches die, the fungus bursts through the bark and appears at the surface. The bracket-like toadstools are often numerous and more or less overlapping, varying in size from 8mm to 5cm across.

Silver Leaf is often confused with False Silver Leaf, a common disorder which as the name suggests looks like Silver Leaf at first glance. Leaves are silvery, but the effect appears all over the tree rather than progressively along a branch. A cut branch reveals that the staining of Silver Leaf disease is absent. The cause of False Silver Leaf is starvation, cold weather or irregular watering.

CONTROL:

Affected branches should be removed at least 15cm (6in) behind where the stain ceases and burned immediately. If they are left lying about the fungus will continue to develop and scatter its spores. It is very important that the pruning tools are then properly disinfected (see 'How to sterilize your garden tools below') before using them on other trees.

It is not necessary to apply a wound paint after pruning, however where silver leaf is a recurring problem this might be the best option. Growing Success 'Seal and Heal' and Bayer Garden 'Arbrex Seal & Heal' are both suitable for this purpose. To lessen the risk of Silver Leaf infection, stone fruits should never be pruned in cold wet conditions, or during the dormant months.

How to Sterilize Your Garden Tools

You can sterilize your secateurs or other gardening tools by immersing the blades in boiling water for 5-10 minutes. Alternatively dipping them in methylated spirit or rubbing them with a cloth soaked in methylated spirit will also work.