

## Peach canker increases economic damage to fruit growers

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BIGLERVILLE — A shortened tree life and the loss of one-third to one-half of the tree's fruit is a conservative estimate of the economic impact caused by cytophora canker, according to Kenneth Hickey, professor of Plant Pathology of the Penn State Fruit Research Lab, Biglerville.

These losses aren't limited to growers, however. Hickey added that research is finding more canker starting in nursery stock that has experienced extreme winter damage its first year.

Planting this stock costs growers a full growing season since orchards must be pulled up and restarted. It costs nurserymen sales and growing time which can be economically devastating to their business.

According to Hickey, cytophora canker or peach canker, affects all stonefruits, but has its greatest impact on peaches. The disease has been identified for at least 20 years, but it was relatively inactive in Pennsylvania until about 5 years ago.

Canker is a fungus disease which invades dead or injured tissue. Although it is not a rapid killer, it cuts down the tree's productivity

and shortens a possible 15 year lifespan to three to four years after invasion of the fungus. Hickey explained the severe winter injury caused by cold damage to the bark of trees over the last three years has made the peach trees in the state much more susceptible to the disease.

Penn State researchers, under the direction of James Travis, Penn State Extension, and in cooperation with Hickey, are now completing studies for surgically removing diseased canker tissue from trees. Hickey noted that the surgical technique is not new; but finding the exact fungicides to be used with the removal is what has to be perfected.

Hickey added researchers had to work directly with growers on determining the economic feasibility of the technique. Stated Hickey, "This is something that the growers themselves will be able to perform. Progressive growers are looking for anything that will get them out of this. We questioned whether the growers would be willing to take the time to do this, because it is a lot of work. But, the growers have said that the price of not doing it is too high."

Hickey explained the purpose of the Fruit Lab's research was to

determine if the disease could be eradicated by surgically removing the canker, treating the tree with a fungicidal disinfectant, and covering it to allow healing. The fungicide and the wound dressing used are readily available to growers.

According to Hickey, the success of the operation depends on: the age and vigor of the tree; the time of year that the surgery is done, preferably only in the spring and early summer; and if the tree has most of the growing season to heal. Hickey stated that trees operated on by June have healed in a couple of weeks.

Hickey stated that the technique

should not be used on trees that are less than two years old or more than twelve years since the possibility of saving those trees for any productive time is minimal. These infected orchards should be removed. The target trees are those reaching peak maturity and productivity from five to twelve years of age.

winters, the varieties of peaches being grown for marketability rather than for adaptability to the area, and the way growers not raise peaches have all contributed to the canker problem. He expressed hopes through demonstrations and educational programs growers will "get back on the right track" in preparing their trees for winter and thereby avoid increasing canker damage.

Hickey indicated the severity of



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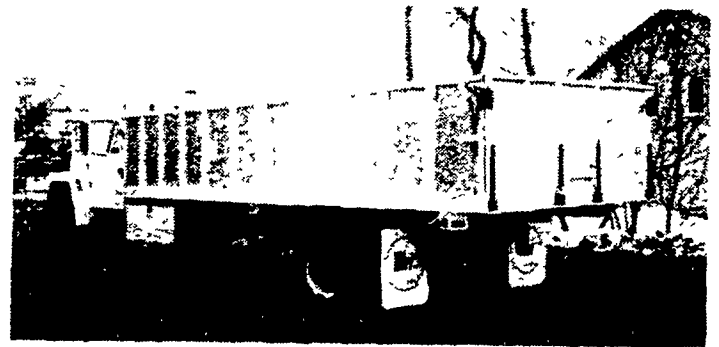
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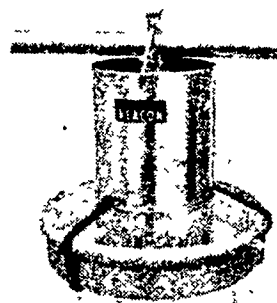
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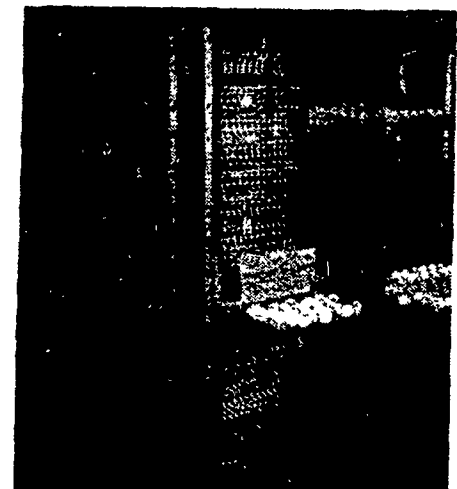
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