Scab and Rust Diseases

Scab and rust diseases are caused by fungi that invade crabapple, apple, hawthorn, common pear, and other ornamental plants in the rose family. Fungi survive by invading and taking nutrition from green plants or other food sources.

Scab and rust diseases rarely kill their hosts. If ornamental trees such as crabapples or hawthorn are severely infected by these diseases, they will look bad but will not die. With average weather conditions, properly timed applications of fungicides and proper cultural procedures, we can control these diseases.

Proper pruning of ornamental crabapples and hawthorns will thin the crowns of the trees to provide improved air circulation. This will help create a less favorable environment for the fungi. Healthy well maintained trees are better able to withstand any stress caused by these leaf fungi.

Susceptible varieties of ornamental trees should have their foliage protected with fungicides during the early growing season. We have found that two fungicidal applications in the spring season provide adequate protection. During unusually wet springs, a third application may be needed. Treatments must be applied on a preventative basis. If disease symptom is apparent before fungicides are applied, control is difficult to achieve.

Quick Facts

- Scab and rust diseases are caused by fungi that attack in the early growing season.
- Cool, moist weather encourages fungal development, leading to more severe infections.
- Increasing air circulation by properly pruning trees will help reduce severity of the scab and rust diseases.
- Certain cultivars of crabapples and hawthorns are more resistant than others.
- Fungicidal applications are preventative, not curative.