

Spur and Cane Blight

Spur and cane blight are fungal diseases that have been very common across the Midwest this growing season. Spur blight is caused by *Didymella applanata* and is very common on red raspberries but rare on other brambles, while cane blight affects all brambles and is caused by *Leptosphaeria coniothyrium*.

Both diseases start from spores produced in lesions of canes infected the previous year. Spores release during rainy periods in spring and are carried by water or wind to other plants. Spur blight spores can only infect plants that remain wet for a certain time period, while cane blight spores need to find a wound. Secondary lesions form in both diseases that produce spores capable of rain splash dissemination that may cause local epidemics.

Spur blight symptoms first appear in early summer as brown or purple lesions just below leaf attachments. Discoloration spreads up and down the cane to the next bud. Affected leaves are often chlorotic and may show wedge-shaped necrotic areas along veins. These leaves often fall off, leaving the petiole on the stem. In early fall, fungal fruiting bodies form below the bark and the bark turns gray and may develop lengthwise cracks. If the canes successfully overwinter, noninfected areas of the cane will compensate for injured areas.

Cane blight starts on first-year canes at any wound. A dark infected area develops, often extending up and down the cane, or girdling it. Canes become brittle and develop tiny black spore-forming bodies. Shoots at or above the infection are weak and often wilt and collapse.

The most important control strategy is removal of all fruited canes and any infected primocanes, before new growth begins. Cane blight needs an entry wound, thus any pruning, topping, or tipping should be done during a dry period to allow the plants to heal. Cultural practices that allow good air circulation for rapid drying are beneficial. If your patch had these diseases the year before, the use of an eradicant fungicide, such as liquid lime sulfur, at bud break may be a wise move, as well.

