

Gardening Basics

Dormant Season Fruit & Nut Spraying

Some spray treatments should be applied during the dormant season (winter) for both fruit and pecan trees. For pecan trees, dormant season treatments are for scale insects, mite eggs, and phylloxera. Dormant season treatments for peach and plum trees are designed to control scale insects and peach leaf curl. Let's focus on treatments for fruit trees.

What are scale insects?

Scale insects are unique because they create protective armor as they grow. They overwinter on the plant and begin to reproduce in the spring. They feed on nearly all parts of the fruit tree - bark, leaves, and fruit and cause stunted growth, leaf drop, fruit lesions, and even the death of branches or entire trees if left untreated.

They often look like small warts or bumps on the tree's bark. The female insect is sucking sap from the plant and laying eggs underneath the protective armor, hidden from view. Many species of scale insects, ranging in size from 1/8" to 1/2", are usually circular or oval-shaped. The color range is broad, spanning from white to brown, as well as red, orange, spotted, or striped.

White peach scale insects (*Pseudaulacaspis pentagona*) and San Jose scale insects (*Quadraspidiotus perniciosus*) can be problems on peach, nectarine, apple, pear, cherry, and plum trees. Scale insects appear as small bumps on the branches and the trunk of the tree, blending in with the bark's texture. The white peach scale is white with a yellow-orange color, and the San Jose scale is white.



Eric R. Day, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0 US

What is the treatment for scale insects?

Applying 97% dormant oil during winter is an effective treatment for scale insects. It is much easier to thoroughly coat the tree's trunk and branches during the dormant season when there are no leaves on the tree. The oil seeps under the scale's protective cover, coats the insect and eggs, and smothers them. Dormant oils are safe, easy to apply, and have little impact on beneficial insects.

Apply dormant oil when the temperature is between 40° and 70° and at least 24 hours before or after rain or freezing temperatures. Follow the packaging label for the concentration mixture, which can be at a higher rate during winter. Thoroughly coat all the bark surfaces, paying particular attention to the nooks and crannies of the tree where scale insects like to congregate. Plan to repeat the application in 2 - 3 weeks. As with all chemicals, be sure to follow instructions and safety precautions.

Peach leaf curl (*Taphrina deformans*) can also be treated in the late dormant season if there has been a history of leaf curl. Apply a copper fungicide or Chlorothalonil following the packaging instructions. Learn more about peach leaf curl disease in this article from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's "Horticulture Update":

<https://agrillifeorganic.org/2022/11/15/peach-leaf-curl-its-time/>

Resources

Allen Knutson and Bill Ree, “Pecan Pests in the Home Orchard”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Extension Entomology, 01 Jul 1 2018, (accessed 04 Dec 2025) <https://extensionentomology.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Pecan-Pests-in-the-Home-Orchard-ENTO-083-Final.pdf>

Allen Knutson, Kevin Ong, and Bill Ree, “Insect and Disease Pests of Peaches, Plums, and Blackberries in a Small Fruit Orchard”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Extension Entomology, 01 Dec 2018, (accessed 04 Dec 2025), <https://extensionentomology.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ENTO-087-Insect-and-Disease-Pests-of-Peach-Plums.pdf>

Bob Whitney, “Peach Leaf Curl – It’s time!”, Texas A&M AgriLife Organic, 15 Nov 2022, (accessed 04 Dec 2025), <https://agrilifeorganic.org/2022/11/15/peach-leaf-curl-its-time/>

“Now's the time for dormant oils”, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Insects in the City, 11 Feb 2011 (accessed 03 Dec 2025) <https://citybugs.tamu.edu/2011/02/15/dormant-oil-treatment-window-closes-fast/>

Phillely, George, James Robinson, Bill Ree, and George Ray McEachern, “Homeowner’s Fruit and Nut Spray Guide”, Texas Cooperative Extension, The Texas A&M University System, (accessed 03 Dec 2025), <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Homeowners-Fruit-and-nut-Spray-Guide.pdf>

Roos, Debbie, “Check Fruit Trees for Scale Pests”, North Carolina State Extension, (accessed 03 Dec 2025), <https://growing-small-farms.ces.ncsu.edu/2016/02/check-fruit-trees-for-scale-pests/>

“Scale Insects”, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, (accessed 03 Dec 2025) <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/encyclopedia/scale-insects>

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