

What is Wrong with my Tree or "Poopy on a Stick"

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The ideal time of year for pruning trees is definitely upon us. Mild days during April are an ideal time to prune trees. Pruning at this time of year allows better visibility and easier access to the cutting zones, and yet allows ample time for the wounds to heal before the insects become active.

Perhaps one of the best candidates for the home “pruner” is a cherry tree infected with a common fungal disease called Black Knot of Cherry. The problems are easy to see, and typically, the trees are small and easy to manage. The term, “black knot”, however, may not best describe the actual appearance of this disease. The fungal growth of black knot actually bears a closer resemblance a “doggie deposit” left by a mischievous, tree-climbing dog. Non dog owners, not having the benefits of these deposits as constant reminders, often describe the growths as “burnt marshmallows on a branch”. However you “see” it, it’s very noticeable at this time of year on many area cherry trees.



This rather unsightly disease occurs on a variety of trees in the *Prunus* genus (especially Canadian Red Cherry) including chokecherry, black cherry, wild cherry, and plum trees. Black knot will cause branch dieback and eventually tree death if not properly managed. Infection usually occurs on branches of all sizes and occasionally on the trunk. Black knot begins with a slight swelling and cracking of the bark. Infected areas later become more noticeable as they turn into hard, swollen, black knots. The appearance has been described as looking like dog “turds” or to be more politically correct, charred marshmallows on a stick. These knots will be visible on branches after leaf drop in the fall and often more than one knot occurs on each branch.

Managing this disease is really quite simple. Prune branches three to four inches below visible knots and swellings dipping the shears in a disinfectant between each cut. Burn, bury, or throw away all infected material. Leaving the fungal structures on the ground will only provide a source of inoculum during the growing season. Continue to monitor branches for knots and swellings throughout the growing season, pruning any new infections during dry periods. Severe infections can be managed with applications of lime sulfur in early spring before new growth emerges, but typically, pruning is the most effective and safest method of control.

Source: Jim Stordahl, University of Minnesota Extension Educator

If you have additional questions feel free to call on me at 605-394-2188 or email me at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu. For up to date information on horticulture and 4-H offerings in Pennington County, check us out online at www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html