

Missouri Chapter News

Walnut Council: Growing Walnut and Other Fine Hardwoods



Disinfecting Pruning Tools

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I am reasonably certain many of you do not disinfect your pruning tools while pruning hardwood trees. You should reconsider including that practice during your pruning operations. At the very least, when pruning you should always be looking for health concerns in your woods or plantation.

When you see a potential issue, it does not mean that you should not prune. In fact, if disease is noticed on a branch tip, then by pruning the limb, and properly disposing of the pruned branch, you may limit disease movement. However, following that pruning cut it is now time to sterilize/clean your pruning implement.

I visited one walnut plantation where *fusarium canker* caused a lot of damage. While it may have been moved by ambrosia beetles, it may also have been moved into and through the plantation via pruning. In the case of fusarium canker, pruning implements should be cleaned between each cut.

Some disease takes a year or two before symptoms are recognized and identified. If you prune an infected, but non-symptomatic tree, then the potential exists to spread the disease.

If you are certain your trees do not have diseased woody tissue that could spread to other trees, you probably can get by without disinfecting your pruning tools. As we all know, pruning should be an improvement practice. So, use caution and always prune with a general awareness of the health of your woods, and have cleaning/sterilization available if needed.



This image of a black walnut tree inside a wire cage shows canker, possibly resulting from fusarium infection.

Here are two good hyperlinks for additional information on this topic:

https://ipm.missouri.edu/MEG/2018/1/cleaning_pruning_tools/

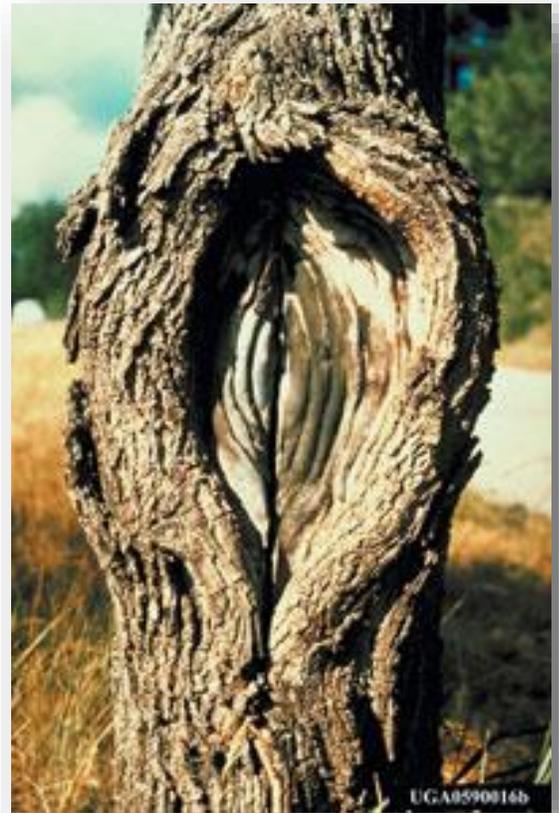
<https://deepgreenpermaculture.com/2021/03/14/how-to-sterilize-and-disinfect-pruning-tools/>



Inexpensive 70% Isopropyl Alcohol is commonly found in grocery and drug stores. Higher percentages are common as well. It can easily be applied to our blades using a plastic spray bottle.

Using bleach to disinfect pruning tools is not recommended because it can cause pitting of metal.

As stated in the cited articles, **“various alcohol solutions, such as ethanol (methylated spirits), or isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol) with a concentration of at least 70% alcohol can be used for disinfecting pruning tools”.**



Images Above - Perennial nectria canker
Neonectria ditissima

- Early canker symptoms are small and difficult to see, usually forming a darkened, depressed area beneath smooth, young bark
- Sunken round to oval cankers with target shaped ridges of barkless wood on large branches or main trunk
- Red to reddish orange raised cushion like bumps can occasionally be seen on the edge of the canker
- Dead branches and twigs killed by girdling cankers

[More information on Perennial nectria canker](#)