

# Apple Scab/Hawthorne Rust

arborSmith abstracts  
practical solutions to common tree problems

**My beautiful ornamental Crab or Hawthorne looks like it is dying... what's wrong?**

It has a fungal disease known as *Apple Scab* on Crabs, or *Cedar Hawthorne Rust* on Hawthornes, both of which do not show symptoms until well after infection takes place. So you get a beautiful show of spring flowers and then the next time you notice your tree it looks like all the leaves are falling off and it appears as though it is dying!



***Apple Scab on Crabs***



These fungal diseases are made worse by cool wet conditions in the early part of the growing season. Rainy spring weather or improper watering can really create bad infections. The fungus attacks the young leaves just as they are forming in the spring. In the case of *Apple Scab*, the infected

leaves normally have a “dirty” appearance with black and grey spotting and then the leaves turn yellow and fall off prematurely, and the apple fruit has a “scabby” appearance which is where the disease derives its name. With *Cedar Hawthorne Rust* the leaves get rusty red spots and the thorn-apples get a “fuzzy rusty red” appearance. The host plant for Cedar Hawthorne Rust is the common Redcedar Tree, shown in photo to the right,



***Hawthorne Rust on Juniper and Hawthorne***



## **Good news, it will not kill your tree!**

There is hope, these diseases can be treated. Although it will not kill the trees outright, it does make them look awful, and repeated defoliations can weaken the trees and leave them open for other more serious diseases or problems to attack them. To prevent this from happening it should be sprayed in the spring of the year when the leaves are just emerging and then again in about two to three



weeks time, depending on the weather. The University of Illinois recommends four sprays but we have found two, or sometimes three sprays in very wet springs, to be sufficient to preserve the health of the trees and yet be affordable.

Infected trees will most likely defoliate much earlier than normal. ***Try not to panic***, we have never seen a tree die from this disease, but it does look awful for the bulk of the growing season. In exceptionally wet spring weather trees *that were treated* can even show some symptoms, but the ones that were NOT treated “*really* get naked”. Sometimes you may even see the tree put out a second flush of growth. Avoid the temptation of overwatering, fertilizing or “spraying” the tree *after* it has exhibited symptoms. These things will NOT help, and could do a great deal of harm to both the tree and the environment. Arborsmith® does this spray for our customers in the spring and it should be done annually to **prevent** infection. Once we see symptoms, it is too late! Our goal is to preserve the health of the trees, not totally eradicate the infecting fungus.

### So what can you do for your sickly looking tree now?

The best thing to do is not allow other stresses to injure your already ailing Crab or Hawthorne. Monitor the moisture levels in the soil under the tree weekly. If we have not had significant rain, and the soil is dry and hard, then give the tree a good soaking by allowing the hose to run over the root zone for a good 6 hours, thoroughly soaking the soil. (Ask for our Watering Abstract) If the soil is moist, DO NOT water, then let it dry out between waterings. This is very important because you can drown tree roots by over watering. By eliminating stress from lack of water, you can insure your beautiful Crabs and Hawthornes will return for another season of growth and beauty. **Caution:** Do not water leaves of trees or you can make the problem worse!

This beautiful show of spring life and color lasts only a few weeks, but it seems so glorious after the long winter.



If the tree in question is not a key feature in the landscape and you feel the expense of the annual sprays is not warranted, then consider removal and replacement with one of the many disease resistant varieties available in nurseries today.