

EARLY DEFOLIATION OF TREES AND SHRUBS

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A lot of Vermonters are noticing their crabapples and apples (*Malus* spp.) in addition to many other deciduous trees, have dropped many of their leaves well

than healthy leaves and these fungal leafspot diseases are a big contributing factor to the early leaf drop. Apple scab is the primary disease that will infect fruit and leaves causing olive brown spots on the foliage. Also contributing to the diseased leaves is cedar apple rust, a fungus that requires both a Malus host and a juniper host to complete its lifecycle. This rust disease causes bright yellow leaf spots on the apple or crabapple host.

If you notice early leaf drop in your apples or crabs, check to make sure there is a good bud set on the tree for next year. These are the dormant buds that will start to grow next May. Also, scratch the bark lightly to make sure you see green healthy tissue under the bark. Both indicate the tree is ready for next spring and is still alive in spite of the leaf drop. To improve the vigor of the tree and to minimize fungal diseases next year, rake and destroy fallen leaves this autumn. If raking is too much work, mow the leaves several times to encourage them to break down quicker. Prune the tree this winter when it is dormant to open it up to air and light.