Helpline Happenings – May 2025
Flowering Cherry Trees

Angelina Duggan



Prunus serrulata
Pennington; April 22, 2025

***Prunus serrulata,* Flowering Cherry Tree**

- Rosaceae family native to Japan, China, Korea, Southeast Asia
- In the wild, it produces small, pea-size sour inedible fruits that appear in late summer
- Prunus avium (sweet cherry) and Prunus cerasus (sour cherry/tart cherry)

***Prunus serrulata,* cultivated by Japanese**

- Single and double blossoms; profusion of color (white to pink shades)
    - Fruit trees white single blossoms
- Showy and popular specimen tree in public and home landscaping
- Traditional upward branching and weeping varieties

Potential Inquiries and Problems

- Why is my tree not flowering (at all or well)?
- What is this sticky gummy stuff on my flowering cherry tree trunk (or branch)?
- The leaves on my tree look sick; limbs are drooping; bark has gummy cankers – is this potential fungal or bacterial infection?
- The leaves on my tree look eaten or worse yet there are gummy looking holes (cankers) on the trunk and or branches – is this potential pest infestation?

Conditions That May Affect Flowering

- Timing for various *Prunus serrulata* cultivars
    - Late March – Early May
- Location: requires full sun but can tolerate some shade
- Drought/over-watering stress
- Requires diligent maintenance
    - Test for optimal soil conditions: acidic (pH 6.5) well drained, loamy, moist, rich soil
    - Timing of pruning to remove dead branches
    - Look out for gummosis fosters infections and infestations
- Aging out – urban (15) – suburban/rural (30) yrs or more

Other Conditions



Gummosis on Prunus Tree

Gummosis: Non-specific protective response to environmental stress and/or bacterial/fungal infections and/or pest infestations. Tree releases sap that hardens into gum; infections/infestations will also cause canker.

Causes

- **Environmental stressors:** Drought, over watering, or extreme temperatures; high-water table
- **Mechanical injury:** Wounds from pruning, mowers, or animals rubbing against bark
- **Pathogens:** Bacterial and fungal infections also result in cankers

Treatments

- Protect against stressors and mechanical damage (wrap tree trunk)
- Relieve environmental stressors
- Prune dead branches; remove gum; seal wounds

Potential Flowering Cherry Tree Infections

- **General type pathogens:** leaf sport, branch/leaf dieback leaf curl, powdery mildew, black/brown rot, and root rot
- **Gummosis and canker causing microorganisms**:
    - **Bacterial cankers:** Pseudomonas syringae
    - **Fungal cankers:** Leucostoma persoonia, Leucostoma cinctum; Cytospora leucostoma, Cytospora cincta; Botryosphaeria dothidea BoB
- **Infectious process**
    - Fungus or bacteria enter through wounds or injured tissues, forming cankers that eventually girdle the tree sap around cankers harden to gummosis
    - Flow of water and nutrients disrupted
    - Tree is weakened; **generally fatal – May need to call an arborist**

Bacterial Canker



Gumming is frequent in the spring and fall, when the disease is most active. Photo by K. Peter. Penn State Extension. 2023

Potential Flowering Cherry Tree Infestations

- **General:** aphids, scale, leafhoppers, Japanese beetles, spider mites. Especially susceptible to tent caterpillars
- **Shothole Borer (Scolytus rugulosus):** attacks weak/stressed trees Small beetles drill holes in bark; creates tunnels and then lay eggs.
  White legless grubs: feed under the bark on the sapwood of the tree causing a gummosis protective response. Holes in leaves is also evidence of borer**.**

Adult Beetle



Grub



https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/FRUIT/PESTS/shothlborer.html

Shothole Borer Canker

Sayen Gardens April 23, 2025



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