

Of late, I have been reflecting on a song from my childhood. The song begins with the lyrics, *“Life is not a highway strewn with flowers. Still it holds a goodly share of bliss. When the sun gives way to April showers, here is the point you should never miss.”* Perhaps you know this song, perhaps not. The tune is *April Showers*, a very old song. Following the opening lyrics, the remaining stanzas foretell the joy and bliss that April showers bring.

I, like most gardeners, am delighted that April showers are returning once again. I view rain as the elixir of life. After all, life as we know it would not exist without water, and everyone knows rain is water. Most gardeners are exuberant when it rains. Even the lyrics from the song *Singing in the Rain* laud a glorious feeling— I’m happy again!

Although April showers generally bring joy and bliss, they can also precipitate problems, particularly if one has juniper (cedar) trees and apple trees growing in close proximity. The problem is cedar-apple rust.

Every year, by mid-to-late summer I receive calls from homeowners asking what is wrong with their apple or crab apple trees. They report the leaves of their trees are covered with orange, rusty spots and many are falling off prematurely. Sadly, their trees are most likely infected with a fungal disease called cedar-apple rust. Unfortunately, by that time it is too late to treat the problem. Cedar-apple rust is a fungal disease. Control of fungal disease is a preventive measure—not a curative measure.

Now is the opportune time to address this malady. The rain stimulates the growth of fungus galls frequently found attached to the foliage of cedar trees. The moisture causes the galls to swell, turning them bright orange and developing strange dangling sticky tentacles. Now, referred to as gelatinous telial horns, fungal spores (microscopic seed-like structures) develop. Wind and rain carry these spores to newly developing apple tree foliage. If not treated, infection occurs, thus perpetuating the disease of cedar-apple rust.

There are a number of methods to manage this disease. First, when shopping for crab apple trees or apple fruit trees, do your research and buy only resistant plants. Read the plant label carefully for its resistant features. If one owns cedar trees, look for galls in late winter before the galls transform into telial horns. As flower buds on apple trees begin to break, spray the foliage with a fungicide designed for this problem. Repeat the treatment two or three times separated by ten days. Chemicals such as chlorothalonil, thiophanate-methyl, mancozeb, or propiconazole are recommended fungicides for this disease. Always follow the labeled directions when using these or any chemicals.

Enough gloom and doom! Following the opening lyrics of the song *April Showers*, the remaining stanzas foretell of the joy and bliss of April showers.

*Though April showers may come your way  
They bring the flowers that bloom in May  
So if it's raining have no regrets  
Because if isn't raining rain, you know, it's raining violets.*

*And where you see clouds upon the hills  
You soon will see crowds of daffodils  
So keep on looking for a bluebird  
And listening for his song,  
Whenever April showers come along.*

There, now doesn't that make you feel blissful? Happy Easter!