



Apple and Pear Scab UK :
ID and Control

Composited off the Internet

By Gareth Richards

Apple and Pear Scab UK: ID and Control

Apple and pear scab UK identification and control: *Venturia inaequalis* lifecycle, resistant varieties, copper sprays, sanitation and spring timing.



Apple scab (*Venturia inaequalis*) and pear scab (*V. pyrina*) are the most common UK fruit tree diseases. Olive-green to dark brown circular lesions on leaves and matching corky spots on fruit. Worst in wet UK springs. Control: resistant varieties (Discovery, Falstaff for apples; Concorde, Beth for pears), sanitation of fallen leaves, copper or potassium bicarbonate sprays at green-tip, and pruning for airflow. Most UK gardens manage scab to acceptable levels without losing crops.

Apple scab and pear scab are the most common UK fruit tree diseases. Caused by *Venturia* fungi (*V. inaequalis* on apples, *V. pyrina* on pears), the diseases produce dark spots on leaves and corky scab patches on fruit. This guide covers identification, the *Venturia* lifecycle, resistant variety choices, sanitation and spray timing.

Scab Identification

On leaves: olive-green to dark brown circular spots with feathery, indistinct margins, often following leaf veins. Heavily infected leaves yellow and drop early.

On fruit: small dark spots ripening to corky scab patches, often clustered around the calyx (flower end) of the fruit. Severe cases produce cracked or distorted fruit. Fruit remains edible (cut away scab patches) but storage life drops sharply.

On young shoots: raised dark scabs on bark, can develop into bark cankers over 2-3 years. Do not confuse these with apple tree burr knots, which are harmless woody root-like bumps rather than scab lesions.

Pear scab shows the same pattern but spots tend to be smaller and darker. Both diseases follow similar lifecycle and respond to similar control measures.



Classic apple scab on a UK Cox leaf. Olive-green lesions with feathery margins follow the leaf veins. Severe infection causes early leaf drop and reduces tree vigour for the following year.

The Venturia Lifecycle

Stage 1 (autumn): Fungus produces sexual fruiting bodies on fallen leaves. These mature through winter.

Stage 2 (early spring): Spring rain triggers spore release from fallen leaves. Spores travel by wind and water splash to new leaves on the tree.

Stage 3 (April-May): Spores germinate on wet leaves. Infection requires 6+ hours of leaf wetness at 6-26C. UK wet springs hit these conditions multiple times per week.

Stage 4 (May-July): Lesions develop. New asexual spores release from the lesions, spreading to other leaves and fruit.

Stage 5 (summer-autumn): Continued cycle until leaf fall. Severe outbreaks defoliate the tree by August.

The critical control point is Stage 2-3: spring spore release. Sanitation reduces Stage 1 inoculum. Sprays at green-tip and pink bud cover Stage 3 infection.

Resistant Varieties: The Easiest Control

Variety	Discovery (apple)
Scab resistance	Very high
Cropping reliability	Heavy
Notes	Early season, August fruit

Variety	Falstaff (apple)
Scab resistance	Very high
Cropping reliability	Heavy
Notes	Mid-season, October fruit

Variety	Topaz (apple)
Scab resistance	Very high
Cropping reliability	Reliable
Notes	Late season, December store

Variety	Saturn (apple)
Scab resistance	High
Cropping reliability	Reliable
Notes	Crisp eating

Variety	Scrumptious (apple)
Scab resistance	High
Cropping reliability	Heavy
Notes	Early dessert

Variety	Egremont Russet (apple)
Scab resistance	High
Cropping reliability	Reliable
Notes	Russeted skin, traditional

Variety	Concorde (pear)
Scab resistance	High
Cropping reliability	Reliable
Notes	Long season
Variety	Beth (pear)
Scab resistance	High
Cropping reliability	Reliable
Notes	Early pearl
Variety	Cox (apple)
Scab resistance	Low
Cropping reliability	Variable
Notes	Classic but scab-prone
Variety	Bramley (apple)
Scab resistance	Low
Cropping reliability	Heavy
Notes	Cooking apple, scab-prone
Variety	Gala (apple)
Scab resistance	Low
Cropping reliability	Heavy
Notes	Modern dessert, scab-prone
Variety	Worcester (apple)
Scab resistance	Very low
Cropping reliability	Heavy
Notes	Old variety, avoid in damp sites

Sanitation: The Critical Autumn Job

The fungus overwinters on fallen leaves. Removing them breaks the cycle.

October-November routine:

Rake and collect all fallen leaves under apple and pear trees

Bag in sealed black plastic for landfill or burn on a hot fire

Never compost in open heap (spores survive composting)

Remove any mummified fruit still hanging on the tree

Prune out canker-affected branches before leaf drop is complete

Alternative for organic gardens: Lay a 25mm mulch of fresh grass clippings under the tree in late October. The clippings smother and accelerate decomposition, reducing spore production by 50-60%.



The autumn sanitation routine. Rake and bag all fallen apple and pear leaves before winter. The 60-80% reduction in next year's spore load is the single most effective non-chemical scab control.

Spring Spray Timing

For susceptible varieties or scab-prone sites, spring sprays provide additional protection.

The three critical spray windows:

Stage	Green-tip
Timing	March-April
Description	First green showing at bud tips
Stage	Pink bud
Timing	April-May
Description	Flower buds visible but unopened
Stage	Petal fall
Timing	Mid-May
Description	Flowers dropped, fruitlets forming

UK products that work:

Copper-based fungicides (Vitax Bordeaux Mixture): traditional, organic-approved. £8-£15 per pack.

Potassium bicarbonate (Resolva Mildew & Scab): newer organic option. £6-£12 per pack.

Sulphur dust: limited but useful for organic gardens. £5-£10 per pack.

Application: mix per pack instructions. Use a knapsack sprayer or pressure sprayer. Spray to coat both leaf surfaces. Apply on dry days with no rain forecast for 24 hours. Avoid spraying when bees are active on flowers.

Pruning for Airflow

Open-canopy pruning reduces leaf wetness duration, the trigger for spore germination.

Winter pruning targets:

Remove all branches crossing the centre of the tree

Open the canopy to a vase shape

Aim for 200-300mm gaps between major branches

Cut to outward-facing buds

Remove any cankered wood entirely

Pruned trees dry 2-3 hours faster after rain than dense unpruned trees. Spore germination requires 6+ hours of leaf wetness. The pruning effect drops infection rates by 15-25% without any chemical input.

For the wider apple and pear pruning, our fruit tree training guide covers fan, espalier and cordon shapes.



Winter pruning to open the canopy. Removing inward-growing branches and crossing wood reduces leaf wetness duration by 2-3 hours after rain. Scab infection rates drop 15-25% from pruning alone.

Common Mistakes With UK Scab Control

Mistake 1: planting susceptible varieties in wet sites. Cox, Bramley, Gala on damp sheltered ground require annual spray programmes for life. Plant resistant varieties instead.

Mistake 2: leaving fallen leaves on the ground. Each unsanitised leaf releases millions of spores in spring. Always rake in October.

Mistake 3: spraying too late. Sprays after symptoms appear are too late. Spring preventative spraying is the only effective spray strategy.

Mistake 4: using too little product. Diluting sprays beyond pack instructions reduces effectiveness. Mix at full rate.

Mistake 5: spraying in wet weather. Rain within 4 hours of application washes the product away. Wait for a dry window with at least 6-8 hours of drying time.

For the wider UK apple selection, our best apple varieties guide covers UK climate-suited choices. For pear varieties, our pear guide covers scab-resistant pears.

Scab Control Calendar UK Month-by-Month

Month	Scab control task
January	Winter pruning for canopy airflow
February	Order any spring fungicide products
March	Watch for green-tip stage. First spray for susceptible varieties
April	Pink bud spray. Watch weather for wet periods
May	Petal fall spray. Stop spraying after fruitlet stage

Month	Scab control task
June	Monitor for early lesion appearance
July	Continue inspection. Remove obviously infected fruit
August	Heavy infection visible if untreated. Plan autumn
September	Pre-harvest assessment
October	Harvest. Begin fallen leaf rake
November	Complete sanitation. Bag and remove all leaves
December	Plan next year's variety additions if replacing trees

Frequently asked questions

How do I identify apple scab in the UK?

Olive-green to dark brown circular spots on leaves with feathery margins, often along the leaf veins. Matching corky scab spots on developing fruit, frequently around the calyx end. Leaves may yellow and drop early. Symptoms appear from late May through to autumn.

What are the most scab-resistant apple varieties for UK gardens? Discovery, Falstaff, Topaz, Saturn and Scrumptious are the most reliable scab-resistant UK apple varieties. They show under 5% scab even in wet springs without sprays. Avoid Gala, Cox, Bramley and Worcester for scab-prone sites.

When should I spray for apple scab?

Spray copper or potassium bicarbonate at green-tip stage (March-April, when buds just open) and again at pink bud (April-May, before flowers open). A third spray at petal fall extends protection through May. Stop spraying when fruit reaches walnut size.

Does raking up fallen leaves help with scab?

Yes, significantly. The fungus overwinters on fallen leaves and releases spores the following spring. Raking and removing all fallen leaves in October reduces next year's spore load by 60-80%. Compost in sealed bags or burn; never leave under the tree.

Can I save a scab-infected apple tree?

Yes. Combine sanitation (remove fallen leaves), pruning for airflow (open the canopy in winter), and a spring spray programme. Susceptible varieties improve to acceptable cropping within 2-3 years. Severely affected trees may benefit from being replaced with resistant varieties.



Scab on developing fruit clustered around the calyx end. The fruit remains edible (cut away the corky patches) but storage life drops by 70-80% versus clean fruit.



Pink bud copper spray timing on a UK orchard apple. The spray protects opening flowers and emerging leaves from early spore germination. Apply on a dry day with at least 8 hours before forecast rain.



Now plan the wider orchard care
Scab is one of several UK apple and pear diseases. Our canker treatment guide covers the related bark canker disease. For the wider apple varieties, our apple guide covers UK climate-suited choices.

The pear varieties guide covers scab-resistant pears alongside flavour and storage picks. And for the broader fruit tree growing approach, our how to grow pear trees guide covers planting, pruning and training principles.

How to Contact the Editor

If you have comments or you know I have given wrong advice then please contact me by email at

gareth.richards@yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

If you have something to contribute or have a say on allotment life, then please use my email to send your contributions.

I am going to process the magazine issue once a month, so if there are comments you would like to make they can be answered in future editions.

I would like to add that most of the articles are taken off the web and some well known gardening and allotments magazines have been read in the making of our magazine content.

We also have our own website at :

www.yeovil-allotments-association.co.uk

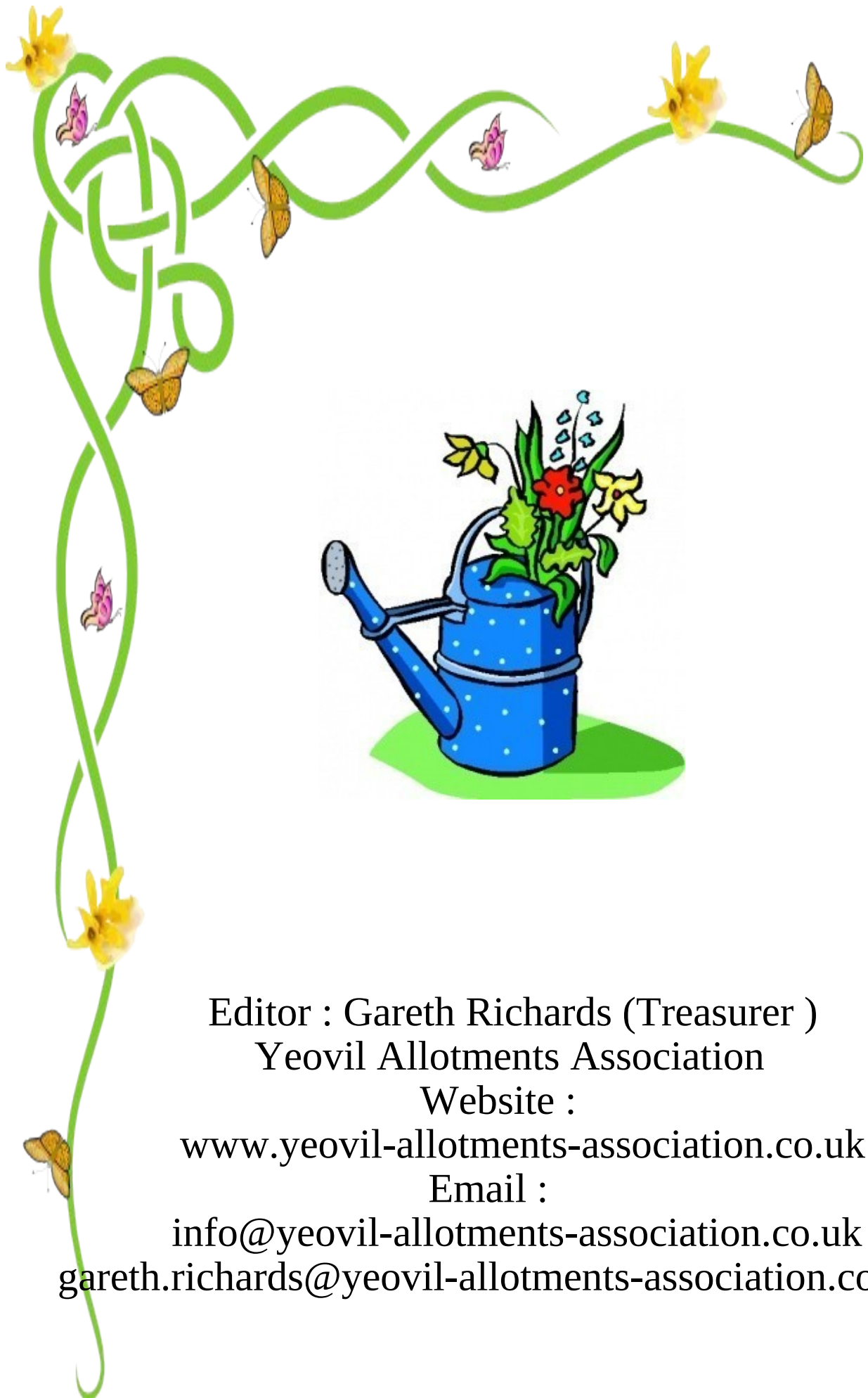
where you can find this magazine as well as a catalogue

Happy Allotmenting and best wishes,

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