

FROM THE FILES OF THE DIRT DIVA DIARIES

Seasonal Pest & Disease Watch Card

What to look for each season — and what to do when you find it.

Don't panic. Most backyard patches will never see all of these problems. This card is a reference, not a prophecy. The Dirt Diva approach is **IPM (Integrated Pest Management)** — observe first, intervene only when needed, and always prefer the gentlest fix that works.

🌱 Early Spring Watch

March - May

THREAT	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	IMMEDIATE ACTION
Mummy Berry FUNGUS	Small, tan-brown "cups" sprouting from the mulch around the base of bushes. These are last year's mummified berries releasing spores.	Rake and flip mulch in early spring to bury the cups. Remove any visible mummies. Improve air circulation with pruning.
Bacterial Blight BACTERIA	Blossoms suddenly turn brown and die. Dark, water-soaked streaks on twigs. Looks like frost damage but continues spreading down the stem. Common in cool, wet springs (especially Pacific NW).	Prune infected wood 6" below visible damage. Apply copper-based spray before buds open and again at leaf drop (fall). Don't confuse with frost — check for dark twig streaks.
Blueberry Shock Virus VIRUS	Sudden wilting of blossoms and young leaves that turn brown and drop. Entire bush looks like it's dying. Appears in early spring.	Do NOT remove the plant! Unlike other viruses, the bush recovers and returns to full production the following year. Mark it and wait.
Scale Insects PEST	Small, immobile bumps on stems. Easiest to spot and treat in spring when they are in their mobile "crawler" stage before forming their protective shell.	Spray with horticultural oil during crawler stage (early spring). Once the "armor" forms, they're very hard to control.
Aphids PEST	Tiny soft-bodied clusters on new growth. Leaves curling inward. Sticky "honeydew" residue attracting ants.	Blast with a strong water spray. For heavy infestations, apply insecticidal soap (must contact the insects directly). Encourage ladybugs and lacewings.

☀️ Summer Watch

June - August

THREAT	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	IMMEDIATE ACTION
Birds ANIMAL	Robins, jays, starlings, cedar waxwings arriving as berries turn blue. Half-eaten berries on the ground. Flocks scouting your patch.	Install bird netting on a PVC frame BEFORE berries ripen. Secure at ground level. Reflective tape or scare balloons work short-term but birds adapt quickly.
Spotted Wing Drosophila PEST	Berries look fine outside but feel "squishy" or collapse when touched. Tiny puncture holes in ripening (not rotten) fruit. Small vinegar flies hovering around ripe clusters.	Harvest every 1-2 days. Remove ALL overripe and fallen fruit immediately. Set apple cider vinegar traps to monitor. Contact your County Extension for spray timing.
Japanese Beetles PEST	Iridescent green beetles on leaves. "Skeletonized" foliage — only leaf veins remain. Most active June through August.	The "Morning Plunge": shake branches over soapy water at dawn when beetles are sluggish. Avoid pheromone traps — they attract MORE beetles to your yard.
Spider Mites PEST	Leaves look stippled, bronzed, or dusty. Fine webbing on leaf undersides. Thrive in hot, dry weather.	Spray leaf undersides with strong water blast. Apply neem oil in evening (not midday heat). Increase watering and mulch to raise humidity around the plant.
Blueberry Maggot PEST	Berries that are soft, mushy, and drop early. White larvae visible when you cut open an infected berry. Adult is a small fly with banded wings.	Hang sticky yellow traps near bushes to monitor for adult flies. Remove all fallen fruit. Consult Extension for organic spray timing if infestation is confirmed.

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Fall cleanup, winter protection, and your organic toolkit.

🍂 Fall Cleanup Watch

September - November

THREAT	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	IMMEDIATE ACTION
Mummy Berry (Cleanup) FUNGUS	Shriveled, gray, hard "mummified" berries on the ground or still hanging on branches. These are fungal time bombs that will release spores next spring.	Remove and destroy EVERY mummy — on the ground, on branches, in the mulch. Never compost them. This is your single most effective disease prevention step all year.
Botrytis / Gray Mold FUNGUS	Gray fuzzy mold on leftover fruit, dead blossoms, or pruning wounds. Thrives in cool, damp fall weather. Can overwinter on dead plant material.	Remove all dead flowers, damaged fruit, and fallen debris. Prune for airflow. Fungicide only needed for severe or recurring cases.
Phomopsis Twig Blight FUNGUS	Tips of young twigs wilting and turning brown, slowly moving down the stem. Often noticed as leaves drop and bare branches reveal the damage.	Prune infected branches 6" below the visible damage. Disinfect shears between cuts. Improve air circulation by thinning crowded interior branches.
Copper Spray (Prevention) BACTERIA	This isn't a threat — it's your fall prevention task. Apply copper-based spray at leaf drop to reduce bacterial blight populations overwintering on the wood.	Spray entire bush with copper fungicide after most leaves have fallen. This is especially critical in cool, wet climates (Pacific NW, Northeast).
Sanitation Sweep TASK	Fallen leaves, dropped berries, spent mulch, and garden debris around your bushes. All of this is a "hotel" for overwintering pests and fungal spores.	Rake out debris, remove fallen fruit, clear old mulch. This one fall cleanup prevents more problems than any spray you'll ever buy.

❄️ Winter Watch

December - February

THREAT	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	IMMEDIATE ACTION
Deer & Rabbits ANIMAL	Chewed or "tipped" branch ends. Clean-angled bites on stems (rabbits). Stripped bark near the base. When other food vanishes, they eat your fruit buds — destroying next summer's harvest.	Surround young plants with wire cages (chicken wire). For high-deer-pressure areas, a tall perimeter fence is the only lasting fix. Check cages monthly all winter.
Winter Desiccation ENVIRON.	Stems drying out, cracking, or turning brown at the tips from cold, dry wind. Especially damaging in exposed, windy sites and to young plants.	Apply 4-6" layer of straw or pine needle mulch. Wrap high-value or exposed specimens in burlap. NEVER use plastic film — it traps heat and moisture, causing worse damage.
Powdery Mildew (Dormant) FUNGUS	No visible symptoms now, but the fungus overwinters on infected buds and stems. If you had white powdery spots on leaves last summer, it's still present.	Prune out any stems that were heavily infected last season. Good winter pruning and airflow improvement is your best dormant-season prevention.

YOUR ORGANIC TOOLKIT — KEEP THESE IN THE SHED

✓ Organic Sprays & Treatments

- **Neem Oil** — Insecticide + mild fungicide. Good for aphids, mites, and powdery mildew. Apply in evening to avoid leaf burn.
- **Insecticidal Soap** — Kills soft-bodied insects on contact (aphids, mealybugs). Must physically touch the pest to work.
- **Bt (Bacillus thuringiensis)** — Targets caterpillars only. Completely safe for bees, pets, and people.
- **Copper Fungicide** — Prevents bacterial blight. Apply at fall leaf drop and spring bud swell. Follow label rates.
- **Horticultural Oil** — Smothers scale, mites, and overwintering eggs. Apply in early spring before leaves emerge.

✓ Cultural Practices (Free!)

- **Fall sanitation** — Remove debris, mummies, fallen fruit. #1 most effective disease prevention.
- **Prune for airflow** — Open up the center of bushes. Air circulation starves fungi.
- **Drip irrigation, not overhead** — Wet leaves invite fungal diseases. Water the soil, not the foliage.
- **Harvest promptly** — Pick every 1-2 days at peak ripeness. Don't leave overripe fruit for SWD.
- **Attract good bugs** — Plant lavender, borage, or bee balm nearby to bring in ladybugs, lacewings, and pollinators.

✓ Monitoring Tools

- **Apple cider vinegar traps** — Detect SWD. A cup of ACV with a drop of dish soap, covered with plastic wrap with small holes.
- **Yellow sticky traps** — Monitor blueberry maggot flies and other flying pests. Hang near bushes at fruit level.
- **Hand lens (10x)** — Check leaf undersides for mites, scale crawlers, and early aphid colonies.
- **Your garden journal** — Record what you see, when you see it, and what worked. Patterns emerge across years.

🚩 The Dirt Diva "Don't Panic" Reminder

- + **Most backyard patches encounter only 2-3 of these issues** — not all of them. This card is a "just in case" reference, not a list of guaranteed disasters.
- + **A few chewed leaves or lost berries is normal.** Healthy, well-mulched bushes with good airflow and correct pH will shrug off most minor pest pressure on their own.
- + **When in doubt, contact your local County Extension office** — they'll identify your specific problem for free or low cost and recommend regionally appropriate treatments.