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## Is This the End for Moraga Pear Trees?

By Sophie Braccini



For the past three Saturdays, a determined group of volunteers has been pruning trees to rid them of fire blight on the pear orchard at the corner of Camino Pablo and Canyon Road, on the lot next to the middle school belonging to the Moraga School District. Other pear trees in town, which are the last remnants of what used to be a major industry, are also affected, some of them very seriously, but they remain untouched since they are located on private lots. The disease could kill these pear trees and contaminate other trees, such as apple, plum and cherry.

"Not all trees are affected the same and some trees can survive the fire blight," says Kenny Murakami of the Moraga Garden Center. Some types of pear trees, such as the Ledbetter pear, is proven to be fire blight resistant and the Kieffer pear is not really fire blight resistant but fire blight tolerant, but Bartlett - the pear most widely found in Moraga - as well as Bosc and Clapp's Favorite are highly susceptible. Murakami says the infected trees will be vectors of disease propagation, especially in the spring when the trees are in bloom.

Moraga resident Bobbie Preston organized pruning last year after she found fire blight in her home garden and noticed the disease on the school property trees. Unfortunately, the disease continued to spread this year. "Last year we didn't cut the branches far enough," explains Preston. "We need to cut the affected branches 12 inches below the last affected leaves." She did this in her garden, and while the pruning seemed radical at the time, the trees have bounced back and are no

longer showing signs of the disease.

Volunteers came to prune for a second time on Oct. 10. They noticed that some branches that had been cut last year, or pruned during the spring, were still infected. "This is the right time to do it when there are still leaves on the tree and the blight is very obvious," says Preston. Volunteers will come back to the lot on Saturday mornings until the end of the month of October to save the historical trees. Preston will share tools and methodology with those willing to tackle the issue on their personal property.



Moraga Councilmember Teresa Onoda and SMC student Diego Rios Photo Sophie Braccini

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