

Aspen

(Populus tremuloides – Quaking Aspen)












Aspen is one of Colorado’s most iconic native trees. In mountain settings it thrives, but in **Front Range landscapes it often struggles** due to heat, alkaline soils, poor drainage, and pest pressure. Common issues include **leaf spots, borers, cankers, suckering, and environmental stress**.



Seasonal Pest & Disease Calendar

Icons: 🌸 Spring | ☀️ Summer | 🍂 Fall | ❄️ Winter

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Active Season</u>	<u>Icons</u>
Marssonina leaf spot	Fungus	Spring infection; symptoms Summer	🌸☀️
Cytospora canker	Fungus	Spring–Fall	🌸☀️🍂

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Active Season</u>	<u>Icons</u>
Sooty bark canker	Fungus	Summer–Fall	 
Oystershell scale	Insect/scale	Spring crawlers; visible year-round	 
Poplar borer / aspen borer	Insect/borer	Summer	
Aphids	Insect	Spring–Fall	  
Leaf miner	Insect	Summer	
Drought stress / heat stress	Abiotic	Summer–Fall	 

Pest & Disease Guide (Homeowner-Friendly)

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Common Symptoms</u>	<u>Treatment & Management</u>
Marssonina Leaf Spot (Very Common)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown or black leaf spots • Yellowing and early leaf drop • Most severe during wet springs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually cosmetic • Rake fallen leaves • Improve airflow; avoid overhead irrigation
Cytospora Canker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackened, sunken bark patches • Resin oozing • Branch dieback from tips inward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prune out infected limbs back to collar • Sanitize tools • Improve vigor—no chemical cure

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Common Symptoms</u>	<u>Treatment & Management</u>
Sooty Bark Canker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black, sooty inner bark • Vertical streaking • Wilting or browning leaves • Rapid dieback in severe cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No chemical cure • Remove infected limbs • Keep tree well-watered and mulched
Oystershell Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard, shell-like scales on bark • Twig dieback • Thinning canopy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat crawler stage in late spring • Horticultural oil late winter • Prune heavily infested twigs
Poplar Borer / Aspen Borer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large oval exit holes • Sawdust-like frass • Weak branch attachment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce stress with deep watering • Remove severely infested branches • Professional preventive sprays if needed
Aphids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sticky honeydew and sooty mold • Leaf curling or distortion • Attracts ants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hose off foliage • Encourage natural predators • Systemic treatments for major outbreaks
Leaf Miner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown serpentine mines • Early leaf drop • Cosmetic unless severe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually requires no treatment • Remove infested leaves • Improve moisture during drought
Drought / Heat Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaf scorch • Mid-summer leaf drop • Sparse canopy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep water every 2–3 weeks • Maintain mulch ring • Avoid planting in hot, exposed, or compacted sites

When to Worry vs. When It's Cosmetic

 **When to Worry (action recommended)**

- Multiple branches dying back (cytospora or sooty bark canker)
- Large borer exit holes or piles of frass
- Entire tree thinning rapidly in mid-summer
- Expanding canker wounds along trunk
- Repeated early defoliation year after year

Aspen decline is **very common on the Front Range**—often due to heat, drought, and soil problems rather than pests alone.

● **Mostly Cosmetic (monitor only)**

- Minor leaf spotting or early fall color
- Light aphid activity without dieback
- Isolated leaf miner tunnels
- Occasional tip dieback
- Suckers emerging (natural clonal habit)

These usually resolve with **proper watering and cleanup practices**.