

What are the little dots on the apple?

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Plants need a constant flow of fresh air, just like people, and that 'fresh air' means carbon dioxide. Flowers, trees, and fruits all absorb carbon dioxide and give off oxygen. But unlike people, plants don't have nostrils.

That's where the plant's pores come in. Each little hole is a hole in the skin of a fruit, tuber, or tree bark. Carbon dioxide goes in and oxygen goes out. Through these little tubes, the plant can "breathe."

Like any flaw, the pit is susceptible to infection and disease. In an apple disease called 'pitting,' a nutrient deficiency causes the apple's spots to darken and turn into brown pits. This doesn't ruin the inside of the fruit, but it does make the apple look rather unappealing to shoppers who expect it to be perfectly shaped. The skin around the pit on the apple becomes mottled and dark, like a strange rash.

Edible fruits and vegetables are not the only plants that have lenticels. Trees have spots on their stems, and these often create beautiful, textured patterns that are prized by gardeners. Birch species have lenticels that run horizontally across their stems; the papery bark of river birch (*Betula nigra*) peels off in the spring to reveal a new layer of lenticel tissue. Tiny dot-like lenticels can also be seen on the stems of native North American shrubs such as oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), papaya (*Asimina triloba*), sweetbush (*Calycanthus floridus*), and northern spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*).

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