

Weather Continues to Create Tree and Shrub Problems

This season has brought its share of gardening problems. According to Cindy Garber, Summer Horticulturist with the University of Illinois Extension Service in Rolling Meadows, the troubles are not over yet. Recent inspection of problems occurring at the Chicago Botanic Gardens, revealed some persistent problems. Included are leaf scorch, iron chlorosis of pin oaks, cedar apple rust and several troubles stemming from winter injury that took place last January.

Leaf scorch is increasingly evident on sugar maples and other large leafed species. The scorch first appeared in May the weekend after Mother's Day, when temperatures reached a high of near 90 degrees and wind gusts close to 50 miles an hour. Then the tender leaves were burned almost instantly, mainly because they had just leafed out and were very sensitive to the drying. Recent temperatures in the 90's and a continuing drought through much of this area has scorched mature leaves as trees try to prevent excessive water loss. The only way to help lessen the effect of the weather is to properly water the trees. Soak them by letting a hose run slowly beneath the tree for several hours. This should be done every 2-3 weeks as long as drought persists. Also avoid applying any spray materials because some of them will also burn the foliage.

An ever-present problem is the iron chlorosis of pin oaks (and red maples, magnolias and some birch as well). These varieties are intolerant of our soils. Soils here are too alkaline and bind up the iron the trees need for green color. Addition of soluble iron to the soil may green up the trees. Sulfur or aluminum sulfate will help to change the pH of the soil but often is only temporary. The only permanent solution is to plant tree varieties that are suited for this area.

After a late start cedar apple rust is also prevalent on apple, crabapple and hawthorns. The disease should not have been as severe as in previous years because we had a drier spring. But this is not so. The orange spots have appeared in great numbers. This disease moves from apples to junipers causing galls which "bloom" in April with masses of jelly. Spraying the apples and hawthorns then will prevent reinfection next year. Nothing can be done about it now.

Winter injury problems continue. The long term effects are often more severe than the immediate damage. Most people seem to think we have seen the last of the damage of last January's record cold. In fact much of it is just now showing up.

Some plants that leafed out normally last spring have suddenly died. Other plants have been unthrifty all season. Still other plants leafed out very late, seemingly dead and now nearly normal.

Severe cold kills some plant tissues but often causes bark to be sensitive to canker fungi which grow into the effect stem and eventually girdle it. This delayed effect is what is showing up now and may continue through this season or even next year.

It is a continuing battle to keep our trees healthy and vigorous in this urban area, says Miss Garber. We are always going to have winters that damage our trees and hot dry summers that scorch leaves.

But don't get discouraged. When replanting, use trees suited to this area. Fertilize and water to keep plants in the best condition. When damage does occur, repair it as soon as possible so the tree can heal.

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