

Tree Forecast for 1992

by Rex A. Bastian, Ph.D.

Humans enjoy forecasting. We try to forecast the weather, the stock market, the economy and the upcoming sports season. Those of us involved with tree care should do a little forecasting of our own. We should take a look at the conditions that existed last season and try to anticipate concerns for the upcoming year.

By thinking ahead, we can be proactive in our approaches toward tree care in 1992. In the past, we have often waited too long before addressing a concern. As a result, we are working with a situation that may be difficult or expensive to correct. If we are proactive, we can head off some concerns and have explanations available to support our actions.

1992 was characterized by a wet spring, a very dry summer, and a wet fall. Because of the extreme drought last summer, many tree root systems suffered injury. It is likely that we will see many trees begin to decline or even die suddenly this year. The number of problem trees we observe will be dependent on our spring and summer weather. A moist spring and summer will be more favorable for the trees. A dry spring combined with another hot, dry summer will put additional moisture stress on trees with damaged root systems. They may survive the dry spring, but may suddenly decline once the soil loses its moisture.

Trees with problems last year will be the most susceptible during 1992. If we are looking for methods to help our stressed trees, PROPER mulching and water management will provide the most benefit. During dry periods, an inch or so of irrigation water per week will provide an adequate moisture supply.

A four inch layer of mulch will hold the moisture in the soil and provide an excellent medium for new root development. We know that mulching on golf courses is often not greeted with enthusiasm. For large trees that are crucial to the line of play, stacking the cards in the tree's favor can go a long way to helping our trees along.

Taking a look at potential pest concerns, the mild winter will undoubtedly lead to an increase in scale problems. We observed a dramatic increase in soft scale numbers. Soft scales include cottony maple scale on silver maples, honeylocust and lindens, and lecanium scale on oaks, maples, lindens, and ashes. The mild winter, one of the warmest on record, kept winter death of the overwintering stages very low. We should anticipate that the number of surviving insects is high and that trees with a few scale insects present last year could have heavy populations this year. Large females can lay over 1,000 eggs, so numbers can increase rapidly from one year to the next.

Trees with heavy soft scale populations can be treated with dormant applications of superior oils before budbreak. Superior oils are very safe and spraying trees during the early season will cause little disruption of playing activity. Treatment now will be much easier than treating the insects at the next vulnerable period which is mid July through mid September. If the trees only have a few scale insects present, let nature take care of them. Scale insects have many natural enemies such as parasitic wasps and predaceous beetles. Let them do the pest management work for you whenever possible.

A good way to catch tree problems early is to anticipate them in advance. Nothing helps more than knowing what to look for and keeping a close eye on your trees. When walking your course, keep one eye on your turf and the other on your trees.

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