

# VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

By Roger Funk, Ph.D., Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio

**Q:** Last winter many of my young trees were damaged by mice. Several years ago we used a chemical to paint the trunks but I can't remember its name.

**A:** The product probably contained Thiram, which is a taste repellent registered for use against mice. One application applied before damage starts should protect the plants during the dormant period.

**Q:** How can I easily tell if the trees I bought from a local nursery are really Chinese elm and not Siberian elm? I do not have any horticultural training.

**A:** The easiest way to identify the two species is the time of flowering. Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) blooms in spring before the tree leafs out, whereas, Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*) blooms inconspicuously in the fall. Also, the buds in the axils of the leaves of Siberian elm are noticeably larger than those of Chinese elm and have a purplish coloration.

**Q:** How can I prevent sapsucker feeding on hemlock trees?

**A:** Sapsuckers are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act so I wouldn't attempt anything too drastic. If practical in your situation, you might protect the feeding area with hardware cloth or burlap wrap.

**Q:** What can be done to protect a tree from an oil spill over a fairly large portion of the root system?

**A:** If the tree is small, it could be replanted in a new location after washing contaminated soil from the roots. There is no practical way to treat large, established trees. Stimulating more rapid biodegradation of the spilled oil by drill-hole aeration (which also helps replace oxygen utilized by the microorganisms), fertilization and liming to correct an acid soil reaction may be helpful.

**Q:** What can be done to improve the condition and appearance of trees injured by broadleaf herbicides applied to a lawn?

**A:** There is no specific treatment to alleviate the injury. In most cases trees recover and will appear normal in two or three years. Pruning the affected branches may help the appearance of the tree. Additional water may also be helpful, but it would probably be best not to fertilize the trees until they show signs of recovery.

**Q:** Our maintenance crew mistakenly applied a herbicide containing Bromacil around the base of some trees. What can be done to protect the trees from injury?

**A:** Since Bromacil is water soluble, water should NOT be applied. Water would help distribute the herbicide throughout the root zone, increasing the potential for injury.

Activated charcoal can be distributed over the treated area to neutralize the chemical. Soil incorporation gives better results since much of the Bromacil may have already penetrated into the soil.

**Q:** What will control moss in a lawn?

**A:** Chemicals such as copper sulfate, ammonium sulfate, and mercurous chloride will temporarily control moss but it will return unless the conditions for turfgrass growth are improved. Factors which favor moss are heavy shade, poor drainage, low fertility, scalping, and improper soil pH.

**Q:** Several of the lawns that we service are full of mounds of soil which I was told were caused by crayfish. How do we get rid of them?

**A:** Crayfish are a problem on poorly drained soils with a high water table. If it is not practical to improve the drainage, contact your local cooperative extension agent about the status of chlordane. A dilute solution poured into the holes has reportedly been helpful in ridding an area of crayfish.

**Q:** We have all heard or read the advantages of top-dressing. What about discussing the problems?

**A:** Top-dressing applies a thin layer of soil on established turfgrass to help control thatch, smooth the soil surface, and facilitate more rapid recovery from stresses. Top-dressing can also change the characteristics of the rooting environment which may have a detrimental effect on rooting.

The most serious problem associated with top-dressing is the formation of soil layers. When a soil is used for top-dressing which is a different type than the underlying soil, a layer of interface is formed. Interfaces resist penetration of water and inhibit gaseous exchange between the soil and atmosphere, thus restricting root growth.

The use of sand as a top-dressing on a clay soil requires special attention to minimize the effect of layering. Current evidence suggests that once sand top-dressing is initiated, continued use of sand is necessary to prevent future problems. In addition, if coring is practiced to allow sand incorporation in the coring holes, the cores from the holes should be removed.

If the existing soil has favorable characteristics, the use of a similar soil for top-dressing will eliminate the problem of layering.

**Send your questions or comments to: Vegetation Management c/o WEEDS TREES & TURF, 757 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Leave at least two months for Roger Funk's response in this column.**