

# PROBLEM SOLVERS

by Balakrishna Rao, Ph.D., and Thomas P. Mog, Ph.D.

## Poison ivy, an occupational pain

**Problem:** I work on a landscaping crew and every year I catch poison ivy. How is poison ivy spread and is there anything I can do to prevent getting it again? (Mississippi)

**Solution:** Contrary to popular opinion, poison ivy is not spread by the watery liquid within the skin blisters. A resin from the plant causes the itchy rash reaction. Washing the skin immediately after coming in contact with poison ivy may reduce the symptoms. The poison ivy resin sets up in the skin 5-15 minutes after exposure, after which washing will not remove it.

Since you know that you are susceptible to poison ivy, learn to recognize it and where it grows. Your landscaping job probably makes avoidance difficult so wear gloves, coveralls, long-sleeve shirts, etc., to protect your skin. Clothing helps but doesn't guarantee that you will never get it again. Poison ivy can be caught by touching clothing, even animals that have brushed against the plants. Some people are so sensitive that the smoke from burning poison ivy plants causes a serious allergic reaction.

The skin rash itself, although uncomfortable, normally does not cause serious problems. It is the scratching which can lead to infection or damage sensitive tissues. Cold water compresses applied to the rash help dry up the blisters and reduce itching. Salves containing steroids, hydrocortisone and/or antibiotics may be prescribed by a physician. When large areas of the body or delicate areas (eg. the eyes) are involved get prompt, professional medical care.

(Excerpted from an article, "Poison Ivy Cures Founded on Myth," by Sharon McDonald, Resident in Dermatology, Columbus, OH)

## Impractical potash fertilizer

**Problem:** I live in New Jersey and have been told that local deposits of greensand can be used as potash fertilizers. Is this true and can I use it on lawns?

**Solution:** Greensand is essentially a hydrated silicate of iron and potash. However, the potassium is insoluble in water and only slightly available as a fertilizer unless refined, which is too expensive to be practical.

## Regulator reduces suckering

**Problem:** We cannot stop suckering on our flowering crabs and apple trees. Is there anything, other than the pruning we have done repeatedly, which works?

**Solution:** Suckering of ornamental trees, especially flowering crabapple trees, is nearly impossible to prevent via pruning. Various sprout inhibiting chemicals and herbicides have been tried but have not been particularly effective. I should caution that the use of herbicides for sprout control is not recommended. The systemic herbicides, i.e., those which move throughout the plant, when misused can cause

considerable injury, even death of the treated tree.

Ohio State University has tested a growth regulator called Tree-Hold Sprout Inhibitor A112, manufactured by Union Carbide. This material is registered for use on crabapples, pear, olive and bearing and nonbearing apple trees. Sprout regrowth from the trunk, from limbs after a branch was removed, and suckering from the base of the tree was stopped when the product was used according to the instructions on the label.

The A112 sprout inhibitor can be applied with a brush or sprayed on. To test for control of basal sprouts and root suckers, the existing shoots were pruned out and the sprout inhibitor applied during the tree's dormant period. The material was also tested by applying it to live suckers, 6-12 inches long. Both procedures successfully prevented sprout regrowth.

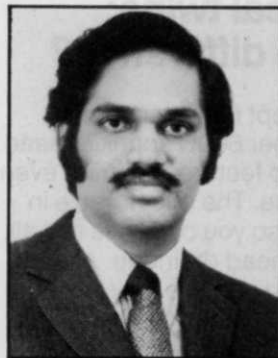
More information about product availability, cost and application rates should be available from Union Carbide or their distributors. We have not tested Tree-Hold Sprout Inhibitor A112, but the OSU results warrant its mention as a possible solution to your suckering problem.

## Yellow nutsedge control

**Problem:** We sprayed nutsedge with Basagran last year and thought we got control but it's back this year worse than ever. Is there a better herbicide on the market that can be used on lawns? (Virginia)

**Solution:** Assuming you are referring to yellow nutsedge, Basagran should give you good control. As a sedge, nutsedge spreads through underground tubers which can be controlled with Basagran if they are connected to actively growing shoots. Proper coverage of the plants is essential since Basagran is absorbed through the foliage and does not translo-

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Questions should be mailed to Problem Solver, Weeds Trees & Turf, 7500 Old Oak Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44130. Please allow 2-3 months for an answer to appear in the magazine.

cate very well. Dormant tubers are not appreciably controlled and may be the reason nutsedge control was not satisfactory. Continue reapplying Basagran on actively growing plants until all of the tubers are gone.

### Elm phloem necrosis

**Problem:** I would like more information on phloem necrosis, the new disease attacking elms. (Illinois)

**Solution:** The origin of elm phloem necrosis is unknown, but apparently it has been around since about 1882. Perhaps because of all the attention given to Dutch elm disease, other diseases of elm have been overlooked or forgotten. Rediscovery or more frequent mention of phloem necrosis may stem from work being done using the electron microscope.

The cause of phloem necrosis is something called a mollicute or mycoplasma-type organism. Loosely speaking, mollicutes are halfway between viruses and bacteria. They are microscopic in size and require special equipment to be seen. Phloem is a tissue found between the outer bark and the wood. Necrosis is the death of tissue; in this case, phloem. Healthy phloem is light-colored, usually white or off white. The phloem in trees with phloem necrosis is yellow, butterscotch (tan) or brown. Necrotic phloem is most evident near the base of the tree and has a win-

tergreen odor. Other symptoms include yellow leaves, drooping foliage and leaf fall. The foliar symptoms are similar to those of Dutch elm disease (DED) and for this reason, cannot be relied on.

There is no known cure for phloem necrosis. It is known that sucking insects called leafhoppers can carry the mollicute from tree to tree. Sprays to control the white-banded elm leafhopper have been recommended. The long-term solution may lie in the use of resistant trees. Asiatic and European species are less susceptible to phloem necrosis.

**WT&T**

### Painting over ivy not advised

**Problem:** One of our clients has exterior stucco walls ranging from two to five stories high partially covered with Boston ivy. The client would like to paint the walls using latex paints. Is it possible to spray paint over the vines when they are dormant without severe damage? (Oregon)

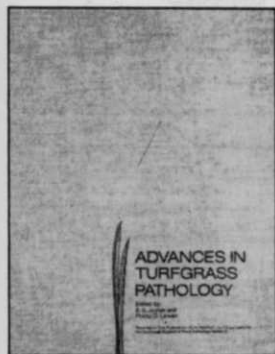
**Solution:** Since paints can affect living plant tissues, try painting a small area of a wall to test for possible injury. Latex paint has been used without harm to tree trunks, however we do not have any information on this paint over Boston ivy.

You may consider pruning the ivy back, without damaging the main stems, before painting. Plants beginning to leaf out or with expanding leaves may have greater potential for exposure and injury.

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