

PROBLEM SOLVERS

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

Summer fertilizer safety

Problem: Our lawns are dethatched, limed (50 lbs./1,000 sq. ft.) and fertilized (10-6-4, 50% fertilizer) each spring and fall. The lawns consist mainly of Kentucky bluegrass and creeping and tall fescue with very little ryegrass, and all the clippings are picked up after mowing. Our summer fertilizer is 20-4-10, 40%. If this is applied before July (mandatory) would it be too strong for summer? (New Jersey)

Solution: Not knowing the exact amount (lbs./1,000 sq. ft.) of different fertilizers being used during different times of the year, it is difficult to respond to your question. However, if you are using these fertilizer formulations to provide no more than 1 lb. of actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. per treatment, then it should be safe enough to use in summer.

Sandburr control in Texas

Problem: What will eliminate sandburrs in the east Texas area between Dallas and Shreveport? (Texas)

Solution: You can use the preemergent materials like diphenamid, trifluralin or EPTC for sandburr weed control on turf and ornamentals in Texas. Although results may vary, you can expect some level of control from the use of these products.

You can expect better results using arsenical materials such as DSMA or MSMA as postemergent herbicides. These arsenical materials, however, may have phototoxic effects and produce temporary discoloration of the treated area. Treat the area when weeds are young and actively growing which would be during late spring and early fall.

Needle drop on Douglas fir

Problem: One of my account's Douglas fir trees are turning color and dropping their needles. What's really strange is that two trees may be right next to each other; one will be healthy and the other appears to be dying. Do you know what is causing this? (New York)

Solution: There are two possibilities; 1) a needle disease and 2) natural shedding of the older needles. So-called "evergreens", like the pines, spruces and firs, shed their foliage just as the broadleaved or deciduous trees do. Most conifers hold their needles for two or more years, after which they are shed.

Needle drop usually occurs in the fall and is a natural process which normally takes several weeks. Sometimes adverse environmental conditions trigger color change and shedding of the older needles at times other than fall. When this happens, the trees' appearance may change from normal to abnormal in a period of days. In both instances the newest needles are still on the tree.

Several different fungi can cause somewhat similar symptoms. The fungi responsible for a diseased condition that results in premature shedding of the foliage are collectively known as needlecast fungi.

With needlecast, one tree may be diseased and a nearby tree of the same species can be free of symptoms. This phenomenon is often attributed to differences in genetic makeup and is called host resistance.

If all firs were showing similar patterns of injury involving only the older needles, then one would suspect natural or environmentally induced shedding of the foliage and not disease.

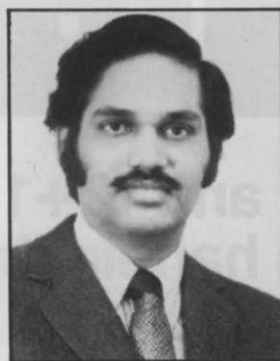
Wood ashes as fertilizer

Problem: What kind of nutrient value is there in wood ashes from fireplaces? Some of our clients are thinking of using these around trees. I would appreciate your comments in this regard. (New York)

Solution: Recently, there has been increased interest in the use of wood ashes produced from fireplace burning as a fertilizer source. The wood ashes from fireplaces contain about 5% k₂o (potassium) and 25% Ca (Calcium). Many people use these ashes as fertilizer in their gardens. Hardwood ashes are frequently used as fertilizer for tobacco growing. From this information, I would imagine that the ashes from fireplaces could be used as fertilizer to supply the above nutrients.

Fruit or shade, rates differ

Problem: I plan on using Benlate to control scab. The label says use four to six ounces per 100 gallons on apples. For shade trees the rate is one pound per 100



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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.