

# PROBLEM MANAGEMENT

by Balakrishna Rao, P.h.D.

## Controlling mice under snow

**Problem:** *Our landscape plantings are often damaged by mice in the winter. How can they be controlled? (Illinois)*

**Solution:** Mice can cause extensive damage to landscape plants during winter months. Their activity appears to be greater around plants covered with heavy mulching or with lots of low growing plants. Therefore, keep mulch around trees no more than  $\frac{2}{3}$  of an inch high.

Mice damage trees by pruning roots, girdling the roots and trunk and by burrowing in the soil. The culprits are usually one of three species: meadow, prairie and/or pine mouse. To identify which, examine the length of the tail. Pine mice have a tail about the same length as their hind feet. Meadow and prairie mice have tails about twice the length of their hind feet. In addition, these latter two mice have rough grizzled-appearing fur, while pine mice fur is smooth.

Managing ground vegetation with mowers, digging or using sod-chopping machines will help minimize mouse activity by reducing the cover for their surface runways. After this operation, remove any debris within a three-foot radius of the tree's base. Where feasible, kill the vegetation around the tree base.

Sunken cans can make effective, safe mouse traps (often called pitfalls). To make pitfalls, punch holes in an empty can's sides from the middle to top. Set the cans in the soil at ground level and fill them with water to the lowest holes. Place these near the back of trails or mice runways. If there is no vegetation cover for the mice to hide in, place a board over the can. Periodically check and empty the cans.

Your local cooperative extension personnel may have additional recommendations for mice control, such as rodenticides or more sophisticated bait stations.

## Blight: legacy of hurricane?

**Problem:** *I recently heard that there is a serious blight on hemlocks in the Connecticut area brought about by hurricane Gloria. Is this possible? (Connecticut)*

**Solution:** I am not familiar with any report specifically suggesting the possibility of serious blight disease brought about by hurricane Gloria. It is more likely that Gloria's winds resulted in trees breaking and consequently declining.

Severe storms can stress and pre-dispose hemlock to some canker, causing fungal diseases. Perhaps the problem you are describing is related to one or more of these canker diseases. Contact your local cooperative extension personnel for further help in diagnosis.

Cankers are slightly sunken, discolored areas on the trunks and/or twigs. Small fruiting bodies may be produced as the cankers mature. A rain splash is often all that is needed to spread the disease to healthy plant.

Most cankers can be minimized by selective and prompt pruning of affected plants parts when dry. Afterward, disinfect pruning tools with Chlorox, Lysol or rubbing alcohol to minimize the spread of disease.

Copper fungicide treatments are recommended in the literature to manage canker, but I'm not sure how good a result one can expect with this method. Keep the trees healthy by proper pruning, watering, fertilizing and by providing pest management as needed.

## Stopping zoysiagrass

**Problem:** *How do you eliminate zoysiagrass, or at least stop it from spreading from one lawn to another? (Pennsylvania)*

**Solution:** There is no herbicide designed for selective removal of zoysiagrass. Therefore, use a non-selective herbicide like Roundup to kill the existing green plants.

Make sure that the zoysiagrass plants are green and actively growing and wait 7 to 10 days after the first treatment to re-treat as needed.

If your objective is to stop zoysia from spreading from one lawn to another, consider using some physical barriers like landscape plastic borders. Even in this case, Roundup can be used if browning after treatments is not a major concern.

## How to obtain manuals

**Problem:** *In your July, 1988 column you recommended the book *Tree and Shrub Transplanting Manual*, by E.B. Hemelick. We have tried to order this book for our library, but were told it is not available.*

*Could you provide us with further information about this book so that we can purchase it for our patrons? (Iowa)*

**Solution:** Thank you for your interest. You can purchase the manual by writing to the International Society of Arboriculture, P.O. Box 71, Urbana, Ill. 61801.



Balakrishna Rao is Manager of Technical Resources for the Davey Tree Co., Kent, Ohio.

Questions should be mailed to Problem Management, LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, 7500 Old Oak Boulevard, Cleveland, OH 44130. Please allow 2-3 months for an answer to appear in the magazine.