

ASK THE EXPERT

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Rhododendron borers and cankers

Problem: Some of our rhododendrons do not look good. They have canker or borer problems. What would be the best way to manage them? (Ohio)

Solution: Generally, borer insect and canker disease agents establish themselves on stressed and weakened plants. Some environmental stresses such as excess soil moisture (wet feet disorder) and nutrient deficiency resulting from improper pH, drought, or winter drying, can affect a plant's overall health. Under these conditions, rhododendrons will be more susceptible to borer and/or canker diseases such as Botryosphaeria canker.

Provide proper growing conditions as the first step in managing most of these problems.

Rhododendrons prefer well-drained soil with a low pH. For this reason, they are called acid-loving plants. If the pH is high (alkaline), the so-called micronutrients will be tied up, leading to nutrient disorders such as iron chlorosis.

Iron deficiency also can further decline plants. Materials containing iron and/or those which acidify the soil will help improve this situation.

For nutrient disorders, determine the deficient element through foliar analysis and provide proper treatment. Provide proper watering, fertilizing and mulching as needed to help improve plant health.

As far as borer management, insecticides such as lindane or Dursban can be used in mid-May. Treat the trunk and branches thoroughly.

For Botryosphaeria canker disease, prune and discard affected plant parts when dry. Disinfect pruning tools in Clorox disinfectant, rubbing alcohol or Lysol to prevent further spread of the disease agent. There are no known effective fungicide treatments for canker disease. Some reports suggest using copper-containing fungicides. Even in this case, the timing and number of treatments needed are not known.

The best method of managing these problems is to select proper plants for site conditions and maintain a good plant health care program.

Treating Dutch elm disease

Problem: Can Dutch elm disease be treated once the tree has been infected with the fungus? (Maryland)

Solution: The success in fungicide treatment depends on early detection and proper treatment.

Dutch elm disease management includes early detection, sanitation (pruning at least 10 feet into the healthy wood) and Arbotect fungicide injection.

In the past, insecticide treatments were recommended to manage bark beetles which spread the fungal spore during their feeding in crotch areas. Some researchers feel it is difficult to get a good coverage of the tree with insecticides and provide sufficient protection to deal with new generations of beetles. Another

concern is the potential of drift to non-target areas which would result in public and regulatory concern. Therefore, practitioners are now considering the feasibility of skipping the insect treatment and instead treating with Arbotect fungicide.

As far as fungicidal injection, reports indicate that better results can be obtained if the crown infection (flagging symptoms) is less than 5%. If the crown infection shows more than 10% of wilting and branch dieback, the chances for survival are much less.

If the dieback and wilt is 20% or greater, the tree cannot be saved. In this situation, it is better to remove the tree promptly.

Prior to removal, if there is a healthy tree within 40 feet of the diseased tree, Vapam fumigant (a soil sterilant) treatment between the two trees is recommended to prevent root graft transmission of the disease. When doing this, read and follow label specifications.

Reports indicate that a three-year rate of Arbotect fungicide injections made at or below ground level on the root flare would be beneficial for better distribution and protection of the tree. Along with this, follow good watering, fertilizing and pest management as needed to improve plant health. Read and follow label specifications for better results.

Roundup persistence

Problem: How long does Roundup last on the soil surface? Sometimes during no-till renovation, we may have to re-treat if the existing plants don't die. Will this cause accumulation of material in the soil? (North Carolina)

Solution: Regarding your first question: according to the Monsanto Co., manufacturer of Roundup, the Roundup will break down once it comes in contact with the soil. As a result, there will not be any soil residual. Therefore, the answer to your second question is "no." Roundup is not known to build up in soil. There will not be any problem of repeated application, if needed to manage the weed problem.

Roundup is a non-selective, post-emergence herbicide. Therefore, you can expect it to manage whatever weeds are growing at the time of treatment. New weeds may establish from seeds or often some of the rhizomatous weeds may present a problem if the Roundup did not translocate uniformly to underground parts. In this situation, a repeat application would be beneficial.

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Mail questions to "Ask the Expert," LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear in the magazine.