ASK THE EXPERT

DR. BALAKRISHNA RAO

Declining privet hedges

Problem: We are finding some old privet hedges that are in various stages of decline producing a lot of surface roots, making them weak and easy to pull out. Could this be due to annual shearing of hedges? *(Pennsylvania)*

Solution: I do not believe that annual pruning is the cause of your problem. In general, hedge plants such as privet are very tolerant of shearing. However, if you remove too much top growth, particularly into the "dead zone" of the hedge, this might put a stress on the plant. Due to the lack of an active growing region and a less photosynthetic surface, plants may gradually decline.

"Dead zone" is commonly used to indicate the interior, nonfoliated portion of the plant. It is about 2/3 of the plant height from the ground. It is not a good horticultural practice to prune the "dead zone."

Also consider the possibility of exposure to extremes in moisture and/or temperature during the past several years—particularly the droughts of 1988 and 1992—contributing to the overall decline.

As far as surface rooting and weak root anchoring, the problem most likely is related to poor site conditions. The site may be poorly drained, the soil may be too heavy, or both. Installing a drainage system is the best solution for managing poor drainage. If the soil is heavy clay, consider amending to improve soil structure. If the soil is compacted, aerifying will help promote deeper rooting.

Also consider applying mulch to protect the roots from winter freeze and a thawing problem. This mulch can also help as an insulating layer to protect the root system from heaving.

Providing subsurface fertilization and watering as needed will improve deeper rooting.

PGRs for home lawns

Problem: We are thinking of using Cutless plant growth regulator (sprayable formulation) on home lawns. How will this product work? What should we do when dealing with newly-seeded lawns? *(Michigan)*

Solution: The sprayable formulation of Cutless is labelled for home lawn turfgrass. This plant growth regulator can be used on warm- and cool-season turfgrass.

To obtain better results, reports suggest mowing the turfgrass first and then applying. As a general guideline, the first application should be made in the spring after two mowings. Water the treated areas within 24 to 36 hours to enhance product efficacy.

According to a DowElanco representative, the treatment response will last for three to three-and-a-half months. The company is researching the feasibility of getting season-long control.

Like other plant growth regulators, one of the problems with Cutless has variable turfgrass growth inhibition response when you are using it on turfgrass containing mixtures of different species or cultivars. Therefore, expect to find some turfgrass taller than others in treated areas.

Cutless interrupts the function of gibberellic acid, thus reducing internode and leaf elongation without causing injury to plant roots.

If you've never tried the product, it might be a good idea to make applications on a smaller scale to learn more about how it would work in your operation.

Read and follow label specifications for better results.

Wild violets on the loose

Problem: Is there an effective remedy for wild violet infestation? *(Illinois)*

Solution: Violets are considered to be very difficult-to-manage weeds. Richard Rathjens, Davey Tree's senior staff agronomist, mentions that application of herbicides such as Turflon 2 Amine or Confront containing triclopyr would help selectively manage the violets.

Both Confront and Turflon 2 Amine can be applied at any time during the season, as long as weeds are actively growing.

Consider two applications of the preferred herbicide, applying the second application one month after the first.

Raining on fungicides

Problem: If it rains after an application of fungicides, will the treatment still be effective? *(Pennsylvania)*

Solution: I am not familiar with any research in this regard. As a general rule, if the treatment material can dry on the foliage prior to rain, the treatment response will not be altered. Many of the fungicides on the market do contain some spreader-sticker type of materials which should help the material adhere to the foliage.

Our experience with fungicide treatments suggests that a couple of hours of drying time before the onset of rain usually helps maintain product efficacy. The efficacy of different fungicides may vary from product to product. Also remember that disease management may require repeat application of treatments at 10- to 14-day intervals to deal with new infections.

If light rain occurs before the treatment has a chance to dry, it may not be necessary to re-treat before the scheduled application. Reapply only if rain washes off the treatment.

Dr. Balakrishna Rao is Manager of Research and Technical Development for the Davey Tree Co., Kent, Ohio.

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.