

ASK THE EXPERT

DR. BALAKRISHNA RAO

Poisoning ivy plants

Problem: We find poison ivy plants growing beneath and climbing on trees in our clients' properties. Would you please suggest some methods to get rid of them? (Indiana)

Solution: Assuming that you have properly identified the plants as poison ivy (*Rhus radicans* is referred to as *Rhus toxicodendron* or *Toxicodendron radicans*, which are older names), it can be controlled either by mechanical means, such as digging and mowing, or by applying herbicides.

Although difficult, digging and removing all plant roots in long pieces can provide effective control. Cut the poison ivy vines at the base of the tree and pull out as much of the plant as possible. However, if a small piece is left behind, it can sprout again.

Remember that poison ivy's skin irritant is found in all parts of the plant, including the roots and fruit, but especially in the sap. Therefore, protect your skin as much as possible. Contaminated clothes, gloves, etc. should be washed thoroughly or burned (if you can afford it) after use.

Roots and stems that are removed should also be destroyed because even the dry plant parts are poisonous. If the plant parts are burned, keep away from the fumes, as they are potentially very dangerous.

Another method of control is to mow or prune young stems until the plants are killed. The objective here is to deplete the nutrient supply of the plant.

Herbicides sprayed on foliage will kill the leaves and may kill roots. Amitrole (trade names Amizole, Amino Triazole, Weedazol) is very effective, especially in the late spring or early summer. Apply this material when the leaves are fully expanded. If necessary, re-treat when new growth occurs. This is a systemic material which translocates inside the plant; therefore, permanent control can be expected with two to three applications.

Glyphosate (Roundup) can also be used. Although slower-acting, it is preferred in some situations because it has a shorter soil residual than amitrole. Here again, if regrowth occurs, re-treat as needed.

Read the labels and follow the directions for safety and better management results.

Wasps cause galls

Problem: One of our clients' shingle oak trees has a large number of galls on the twigs. They are very hard. We see quite a bit of dieback in the crown. What causes this? Would this spread to other oaks (not shingle oaks) nearby? Is there anything we can do to manage this? (Missouri)

Solution: The galls you are referring to are most likely caused by a tiny wasp. These are commonly called gouty oak galls. They can be very destructive, and their management is very difficult.

Reports indicate an increase of galls last year, because of the mild winter. Some of the galls may not have become evident until this year's growing season because of their complex lifecycle.

The adult wasps consist of only females, which emerge from twig galls during leaf expansion in spring. They lay eggs along the

veins and midribs of the new leaves. The eggs hatch into tiny larvae, and their feeding swells the tissues underneath the leaves. They generally pupate in late June to early July. The new generation, unlike the previous, will have both males and females which mate and lay eggs on oak twigs. These eggs hatch and produce galls on twigs, which take two to three years to mature into a hard woody structure.

In the case of gouty oak galls, there are no protruding structures called "horns." A similar gall called horned oak gall will have protruding horns. These galls can cause extensive dieback and may lead to the tree dying.

Management is very difficult because of the complex and overlapping lifecycles, and because the larvae are protected inside the gall tissues. Applying insecticides to manage these wasps after the gall formation doesn't help. Where feasible, consider selective pruning and destroying the affected plant parts to help minimize the problem.

Reports suggest that applying horticultural oil combined with a labeled insecticide (contact your local extension office) can help manage the hatching larvae. This should be done before the larvae enter the host tissue. Even with this approach, managing this problem is very time-consuming, difficult and may not be practical.

For fruit in sweetgum, sycamore

Problem: Is there a chemical we can use to get rid of unwanted fruits from sweetgum and sycamore trees? (Michigan)

Solution: I am not aware of any products labeled specifically for this problem. However, the Florel brand plant growth regulator from Rhone-Poulenc Ag Company is showing promising results in our research trials.

Both sycamore and sweetgum have objectionable fruits and present a serious problem on lawns and sidewalks. Florel should take care of these "messy" problems.

A Rhone-Poulenc representative indicates that Florel has been submitted for label expansion. Registration is expected by early 1994. The expanded label will have both sweetgum and sycamore listed.

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.