

Problem with spruce

On one client's property, there are three Colorado blue spruce trees in the back and two in the front of the house. The three in the back yard are showing some problems. During the first week of May we treated all of the trees with carbaryl for spruce gall. The problems consist of browning of new growth and rusty color of 2- to 3-year-old needles. Any idea what the problem might be? What can be done now to help the trees?

— TORONTO, CANADA

Based on your description and the sequence of events, the problem is most likely related to phytotoxicity (plant injury) resulting from spraying carbaryl (Sevin). Several factors related to pesticide applications can cause phytotoxicity:

1. Improper mixing of pesticides (high rate).
2. Using a combination of incompatible products.
3. Treating at high pressure — thus blasting.
4. Treating on sunny days — if the mixture sits in the hose for a period of time, it can get very hot. When the hot mixture comes in contact with the plants it causes injury. Often the plants that were treated first may show more injury, with later treated plants showing less injury as the treatment continues. It is important to re-circulate the mixture back into the tank to avoid the mix from becoming too hot.

In your situation, perhaps the trees in the back yard were treated first, while the mix was

hot. After treating those trees, you moved to the front yard, which would not be affected because the cool mix from the tank has moved through the hose and therefore, is not hot.

5. Dry soil — make sure soil moisture is adequate when treating in the future.

6. Plants under stress. Review your treatment program and evaluate treatment techniques to avoid problems in the future.

Wait to see how the plant recovers, then check the terminal buds. If they are green the plant should produce normal, new growth. However, if the buds are brown or black they are dead.

One other possibility for discoloration may be winter drying and/or mite feeding damage. Check for these possibilities.

Since the plants are stressed consider treating with a miticide to manage the potential mite problem. Providing the proper amount of water, fertilizer, mulch and pest management will improve plant vigor.

If it quacks

We have a serious problem with quackgrass growing in our flower beds, on areas of our house foundation and a little bit in our lawn. Is there a selective herbicide that will kill the quackgrass? What can be done to manage this?

— ILLINOIS

Quackgrass is a very aggressive perennial weed, with extensive underground rhizomes. It can spread rapidly in open

areas, as well as other landscaped areas.

Once established, quackgrass can be difficult to manage. There is no selective herbicide for management. Very early in the developmental stage it can be selectively, mechanically dug. However, it is important to remove all underground rhizomes. If they are not removed, they can sprout and present a problem in the future.

Another option is a non-selective herbicide, such as Roundup, Finale or Scythe. These herbicides will kill a wide variety of vegetation in the treated area. While using these herbicides, make sure that the treatment doesn't get on non-targeted plant areas. Also, product effectiveness depends on several factors such as concentration of treatment mix, actively growing quackgrass and proper coverage. The treated area may require reseeding.

Fire ants go to school

Is there anything we can use to manage fire ants in school grounds?

— TEXAS

Amdro Pro from American Cyanamid can be used to manage fire ants in several locations including school grounds. This has been recently added to the label along with other sites such as airports, roadsides and cemeteries.

Make sure that your pesticide applicator license will allow you to treat in these areas.

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