

I have to admit, I'm not a big fan of spruce. I won't go into details but I'll give you a brief picture: a bad-tempered pony, bit in teeth; a 10-year-old girl (me); a spruce hedgerow in the direct path of the bolting pony. Draw your own conclusion. The event has colored my impressions of spruce trees ever since, and even had an impact on my decision to go into forestry.

How often have you seen a Colorado blue spruce dwarfing a house, particularly a ranch-style house? Spruce trees — more than any other species — seem to be planted without any thought for the long-term effect or consideration of the landscape as a whole. Or, perhaps, they just command more attention. Their formal, conical profile can dominate a small landscape. The fact is that spruces can be too much of a good thing in many residential landscapes.

That doesn't mean that you must avoid using spruce in these landscapes. The colors of a blue spruce or the form of a healthy Norway spruce is beautiful, adding texture and scale to a landscape —

where they have room to grow.

For instance, just down the street from the *Landscape Management* offices is a new two-story home recently "professionally" landscaped with no less than five 8- to 10-foot Colorado blue spruces, plus a number of flowering trees and assorted shrubs. Considering that the front lawn is about 50-feet across, I am amazed that so many plants could be squeezed into a single small landscape. And, while it looks nice (but busy) now, what about a few years down the road?

Colorado blue spruce is a particularly over-used conifer in many landscapes. Granted, it's a nice tree but more often than not it seems poorly located and, many times, in poor condition. Even when planting just one blue spruce, finding a suitable location in the landscape can be a challenge. Its stiff, coarse form and blue color draw attention

from even the most well-designed landscape. In addition, this attractive tree has a variety of potential problems:

- ▶ It grows to 30 to 60 feet in height with a spread of 10 to 20 feet. It needs room, lots of room.

- ▶ It suffers stress in hot, dry, polluted conditions and subsequently declines and fails. It will grow in a wide range of zones (2 to 7), but shouldn't be planted just anywhere.

- ▶ It's prone to spruce gall aphid, which makes pineapple-shaped galls on the tips of the branches, reducing its attractiveness.

- ▶ It can suffer from *Cytospora* (sigh-toss-spora) canker. *Cytospora kunzei* is the most common and



The early stages of *Cytospora*. It will continue to move up the crown of the tree, severely reducing aesthetic value as well as tree health.

damaging disease of spruces in the landscape. This fungus attacks spruces stressed by drought, poor nutrition, mechanical injuries or other diseases. *Cytospora* canker girdles branches, usually starting from branches lower in the crown and moving upward, although it can occur further up in the tree as well. Each year, more branches are infected and die. There is no cure for this disease other than maintaining the health and vitality of the tree and pruning out the infected branches.

Spruces have their place but that place should be in large scale plantings, not squeezed into residential yards. These trees need space, so that their mature size does not overpower the landscape. **LM**

Too much tree for many landscapes



Nancy Stairs

NANCY STAIRS
Technical Editor

Agree/Disagree? Comments/Questions?
Column Suggestions? Let Nancy Stairs know
at 440/891-2623. Fax: 440/891-2675.
E-Mail: nstairs@advanstar.com