

# ask the expert

BY BALAKRISHNA RAO

## Satin moths

**What are satin moths? Please explain biology and management options.**

— TORONTO, CANADA



The satin moth (*Leucoma salicis*) is an introduced pest. Its larvae are about 1½ to 2 in. long, black with a line

of yellow or white spots on the back and reddish brown tubercles with hairs on each segment. The larvae are active during April and May, feeding on pole-sized Populus in natural strands and plantations in New England and southeastern Canada, and also in Washington and Oregon.

Adult moths are satiny white and appear in June and August. Females can lay up to 1,000 eggs in clusters on twigs, trunks or leaves in June and July. Larvae appear in August and feed on leaves until it gets cold. They overwinter as small larvae that become active when it gets warm.

Like gypsy moths, satin moths pupate around May in cocoons on trees. Adults emerge in June.

Treatment is not necessary, but if defoliation is severe, consider applying Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) in spring. Products like Dipel or ForayBt work well.

## Dying spruces

**We planted many spruce trees in June 2000. Last winter, needles turned pale, and a few turned brown. What's the problem?**

— MI

Based on your description, I'd say the problem is transplant shock. Digging and trans-

planting causes trees to lose large amounts of functional absorbing roots, which causes water and nutrient uptake problems. This is further aggravated by too much or too little moisture, including flooding and/or drought. The roots are the mechanical pumps, and if they're broken or diseased, they become dysfunctional. This disruption and imbalance in water uptake leads to the drying out of plant tissues. This can be further aggravated by wind and excessive evapotranspiration from exposed plant parts, particularly in evergreens when the ground is frozen. And beware — plants may look green for a period of time only because they're using their reserve water and nutrients.

Consider the possibility of girdling at the base of the stem. Mechanical girdling from nylon or wire left during planting can disrupt moisture and nutrient uptake. Examine the roots for decay from root rot fungal disease.

Guard against overfertilizing these plants, particularly with a water-soluble source of quick-release fertilizer. Improper fertilization with high salt index can burn absorbing roots. Also, don't mulch too close to the trunk as it can cause rodent feeding activity. Provide proper watering, mulching, fertilizing and pest management as needed to improve plant health.

## Annual grassy weed management

**In the past, we've used Surflan to manage annual grassy weeds. In some situations, we've had poor results. What do you think we might be doing wrong?**

— OH

From your question, it isn't clear whether you used Surflan as a pre-emergent (before

the grassy weeds emerged) or as a post-emergent (after the weeds emerged) herbicide. Surflan is a selective pre-emergent herbicide that controls annual grasses and several broadleaf weeds. It doesn't work as a post-emergent herbicide.

If you've used Surflan as a pre-emergent herbicide and experienced variable results, the following explanation might be helpful. Make sure you're following sound procedures when tank mixing. Follow the label guidelines while mixing Surflan alone or in combination with other materials. It's important to have agitation all through mixing as well as spraying. Without proper agitation, Surflan may settle to the bottom of the sprayer tank, which could contribute to poor results. Surflan doesn't have to be incorporated, but water in within 21 days with 1/2 to 1 in. of water.

## Oxalis, violets everywhere

**Many of our residential and commercial lawns have oxalis (wood sorrel) and violets (Viola sp.). How should we manage this problem?**

— OH

Application of an herbicide such as Turflon II Amine should help. Provide two applications of this herbicide four to six weeks apart. Delay watering for 24 hours and seeding for three weeks. If the area was recently seeded, wait until it has been mowed two to three times before treating.



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**SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO:** "Ask the Expert" Landscape Management; 7500 Old Oak Blvd.; Cleveland, OH 44130, or email: [sgibson@advanstar.com](mailto:sgibson@advanstar.com). Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear.