

ask the expert

BY BALAKRISHNA RAO, PH.D.

Yucky yucca

Two years ago I removed an overgrown and diseased Yucca plant from a flower bed, but it keeps growing back. On two different occasions I dug deep down to remove the thick, fibrous roots, but I guess I didn't get all of them out because the plant shot up out of the ground again after just a few weeks. Can you recommend a product that will kill the roots?

— IL

Consider using a systemic herbicide such as Roundup or a contact herbicide such as Finale on actively growing green plant tissue. Since the active ingredient may have difficulty penetrating into a succulent plant such as yucca, you may also want to consider Accord SP. This product contains the same active ingredient as Roundup with a proprietary surfactant that aids in penetration. Thorough coverage is important. Repeat treatments as needed. You could also dig as you have done before or use a stump grinder to destroy the roots.

Controlling oxalis

Our small lawn care company uses a dry fertilization program. For weed control, we want to spot treat with herbicides. Is there a pre-emergent herbicide that would help us control oxalis?

— IN

Oxalis is a weed that's difficult to manage. Spot treating oxalis with herbicides is difficult because it produces many seeds during the growing season which, when mature,

spread by bursting the seedpod. This process gradually spreads the weed plant outward from its mother plant. Even seeds that don't immediately grow into weed plants are a threat as they can remain viable in soil for 15 to 20 years. You'll need repeat applications of selected herbicide.

The success of spot treating hinges upon periodic inspection and treatment as needed by a professional lawn care operator. Consider using a pre-emergent herbicide such as Dimension, Pendimethalin or Gallery as the weeds germinate.

Recognize that weeds are opportune pests. They appear for a reason. Poor density and turfgrass health quality can open up weed establishment areas. Therefore, note lawns with a history of oxalis and consider treating with herbicides as needed in the spring.

Spruce tree trouble

A large number of spruce trees we planted in June 2000 did fine until winter, when some needles turned a pale color and others brown. We're afraid some of the trees may not survive. Any idea what may be the problem? Do you have any tips for helping them?

— MI

Based on your description, the problem appears to be related to transplant shock. Digging and transplanting causes trees to lose a large amount of functional absorbing roots, which leads to water and nutrient uptake problems. This can be further aggravated by too much or too little moisture, including flooding and/or drought. Absorbing roots are the mechanical

pumps, and if they're broken or diseased they become dysfunctional. This disruption and imbalance in water uptake results in plant tissues drying out, which can be made worse by wind and excessive evapotranspiration from exposed plant parts.

Remember that a transplanted plant such as a Christmas tree may look green for awhile, but that's only because it's using its reserve water and nutrients.

Make sure these plants aren't overfertilized, particularly with a water-soluble source of quick-release fertilizer. Improper fertilization with high salt index can burn some of the absorbing roots. Also, mulching too close to the trunk encourages rodent feeding activity and excessive moisture retention. Examine the roots for decay caused by root rot fungal disease.

Weird fungus

One of my customers has a weird fungus on his lawn that looks like small, white, fluffy tufts sitting among the grass blades. Any idea what this could be?

— PA

The problem appears to be related to a fungal disease called slime mold. This normally grows on grass blades and produces fruiting bodies as it matures. They don't cause too much harm to turfgrass. It is often more of an aesthetic problem. Sweeping and hosing with water will reduce the problem.

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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. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear.

