

ask the expert

BY BALAKRISHNA RAO

Falling berries

Many of our customers planted holly trees because of their red leaf and fruit color in winter. Why are some of the trees' holly berries remaining green and falling off?

— VA

Study the affected plants on site for any potential environmental soil and/or root related problems such as exposure to extremes in moisture and/or temperature, abnormal or dysfunctional roots resulting from poor growing conditions and soil type.

Also, consider the possibility of a holly berry midge problem. The adult midge is a small, mosquito-like insect 1.6 to 2.3 mm long. The larvae are 1 mm long and yellow. Look for brown pupal cases protruding from the berries.

The midge has one generation per year and over winter as larvae. Adults emerge when holly plants produce flowers; females lay eggs in the young fruit while the petals are still on the flowers. Adults emerge from the berries around May, fly short distances of two to three feet and hide under leaves or other protected places. When the infestation is severe, affected fruit berries fail to turn red because of the holly berry maggot, so the trees don't look as pretty.

Weevil woes

White pines in our area are showing 2-ft. long terminal dieback. They tend to bend into an inverted "U" shape. What do you think is the problem? Any suggestion to manage this?

— OH

From your description of the symptoms, the problem appears to be related to white pine

weevil insect damage. This insect is a common pest of white pine in landscaping and forest areas, and can also attack spruce trees.

White pine weevils attack the terminal new growth of white pines. Affected plant parts discolor and show dieback, curled into the shape of a shepherd's crook. Upon closer examination, you can see minute holes the size of the tip of a ballpoint pen. Remove the browned-out bark from the affected area and look for larval tunneling and lots of sawdust-like frass. You may find yellowish larvae (1/3-in. long) if the life cycle isn't completed.

The larvae feed on inner bark, the sapwood of leading branches and terminal shoots of the main trunk. The affected leader will be killed and the subsequent branches growing in that area will be distorted or killed. The larvae pupate in wood chip cocoons and emerge as adults. The beetles begin to emerge in late July to late August, leaving distinct emergence holes in the bark. The adults feed on the bark of terminals before dropping to the litter to overwinter. On warm spring days, adults move to treetops to mate and lay eggs in the bark.

To manage the problem, prune and destroy all infected branches in early spring. Applications of insecticides such as Talstar or Astro might help manage the adults. Treat leaders in spring when overwintering beetles appear, about mid-April to mid-May. Valuable plants also should be treated again between mid-August and mid-September.

Mowing in the rain

Our athletic field maintenance crews won't mow in the rain because they say

it will tear the grass and compact the ground. If this is the case, why do I see landscapers out all the time in rain showers? Is there a cutoff point? What is the criteria?

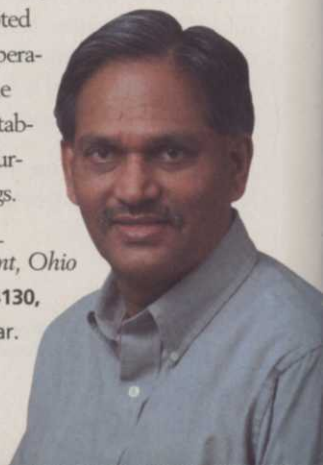
— PA

If you have a choice, avoid mowing in the rain or when it's too wet. Landscapers are sometimes so busy, however, that they don't have a choice and must mow when they can. In a situation like that you could mow during light rain. Avoid mowing in pouring rain as visibility is bad.

Adjustments can be made to deal with mowing in the rain. Keep the rpm higher and blades sharper, and run the blades faster to prevent turfgrass clippings from accumulating in the mower deck. When you're finished mowing, wash off the clippings and clean the deck.

It's also important that the mower wheels not follow the same tracks with each mowing. This is particularly important when the soil is wet as it tends to cause compaction. For example, there's a tendency to edge or border an area in the same manner each time, which would put the wheels in the same track. To minimize compaction during edging, you could offset the wheel track by using only a portion of the deck of a mower that had multiple reels or making a half swath with a single reel. Also, you should mow the open areas in different directions each time.

Make sure the turfgrass in these areas is adapted for the mowing operation. Wait until the turfgrass is well established to avoid injuring young seedlings.



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SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO: "Ask the Expert" Landscape Management; 7500 Old Oak Blvd.; Cleveland, OH 44130,

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