

ask the expert

BY BALAKRISHNA RAO

Mystery growth

We take care of several large properties with trees on them. On some of the trunks, there's a mostly green, sometimes white fungus which appears to be mostly on the bark. It's not very thick and it grows in circular patterns. What are these and how do we get rid of them?

— IL

Based on your description of the growth on the tree trunk, the problem appears to be related to lichens. Lichens are the result of symbiotic association of certain fungi with certain algae. These lichens produce the circular green and white growth and don't cause harm to trees. They're mainly an aesthetic concern, growing on tree trunks to take shelter there.

There's no practical solution to manage these lichens. They tend to establish in a cool and moist environment. Check whether or not the trunks remain wet for a long period of time from overhead sprinkler watering. Monitoring and avoiding this type of watering, plus improving air circulation underneath the bark by selective pruning, might help the problem.

Proper sod installation

How should you prepare the ground to be sodded to avoid creating a soil interface? Also, what's the best time of year to seed turfgrass in our area?

— MI

Prepare the soil prior to sod installation or seeding. If this isn't done, the result may be a soil interface, which occurs when two distinctly different soils come in direct contact.

This is common when a peat-grown sod is laid directly on heavy clay and compacted soil. Water won't pass uniformly through an interface. If water doesn't penetrate, neither will roots.

To prepare the soil for seeding or sodding, cultivate it and remove large stones and foreign objects like tree roots. Till organic matter into the top six to eight inches of the soil to provide a transitional soil between the underlying soil and sod. Never "layer" soil or amending agents, since this could also create an interface. Make sure the area is graded properly for proper drainage and water flow. Any potential "sink type" low areas should be corrected. Prior to cultivation, conduct soil pH and texture analysis tests, and provide corrections as needed. Correcting pH and amending the soil with phosphorous is easier while cultivating or tilling the area.

Rake the area by hand or with proper equipment. Apply starter fertilizer as needed. This tilling, raking and grading operation should minimize the compaction, water drainage and potential interface problem.

Also, consider obtaining sod with little or no thatch. Excess thatch, when dry, can cause a hydrophobic (repel water) condition and lead to run off of water and poor root establishment. After proper turfgrass establishment, aerify the turfgrass to minimize potential interface and rooting problems.

In your area, the turfgrass can be seeded in spring and/or fall. Seeding in fall around Labor Day is better than in spring since the temperature is cooler and there's plenty of moisture. Also, there are less weed problems to deal with. Seeding in spring is okay, but recognize that the subsequent temperature may be high with low moisture and isn't favorable for proper seed ger-

mination and turfgrass establishment. There's also a greater potential for weed establishment and competition.

Tussock tussle

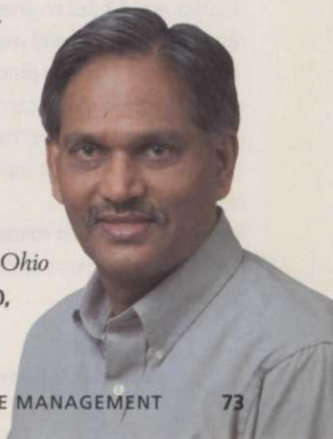
Last year we saw some feeding activity from tussock moths on cherry trees along the street. We're thinking of using Bt to manage them. How well will this work? When is the best time to treat for them?

— OH

Yes, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) products such as Dipel DF or Foray 48-B can be used to manage the tussock moth problem. Bt works best when applied on young larvae. As the larvae get older and larger, they become difficult to manage with Bt. You may have to use some pyrethroid such as Talstar, Deltagard or other insecticides.

Tussock moths can defoliate trees partially or skeletonize trees during feedings. Depending upon the type of tussock moths you have, there may be one to two generations per year. The white marked tussock moths, common in your area, have two generations per year, while the pale tussock moths have one generation. Their names are based on the appearance of the adult moth, so monitor the adult moth activity for further identification.

As far as managing the tussock moth, consider treating with the Bt of your choice around mid-May or when dogwoods are blooming. Reportedly, the dogwood blooming period coincides with tussock moth emergence and activity. Again, treat as needed in mid- to late August.



Manager of Research and Technical Development for the Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio

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