

NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

July 1, 2024

Spring Weather & Tree Problems

Rain, late frosts, wind, and more rain! Foliage damage and diseases favored by our weather this spring both contribute to tree problems we are seeing now throughout the northwoods. The good news is the actual threat to tree health is usually not as serious as it looks.

Despite a mild winter and early spring, late frosts and freezes occurred in April and May, along with considerable wind, hail, and driving rain. As a result, newly emerging leaves on trees sustained damage. There may be holes in the leaf interior, frequently appearing in a symmetrical pattern, as the damage occurred as the leaf developed in the bud. Injured leaves also may have torn or ragged edges. Often this type of damage is confused with insect feeding. Frost injury may cause blackened areas on leaves.

The extent of damage to weather-related problems depends on what stage of development the tree was at when the winds, hail, or frost hit. Not much can be done about the problem. Trees may send out additional leaves after losing foliage.

Anthraxnose is a common fungal disease on trees this season; favored by cool, wet weather as leaves are developing. Anthracnose appears as blotches or irregular patches on leaves, usually brown or tan in color.

Maples and oaks are among the trees this disease commonly appears on. At this point, no action can be taken but this leaf disease is not considered a threat to overall tree health.

Apple scab also is favored by our cool wet spring conditions. Flowering crabapples and orchard apples are both susceptible to this fungal disease. Infection starts as leaves emerge from buds. Once infected, foliage develops olive green to black spots. Leaves may then curl, turn yellow or brown, and eventually drop off early. It is possible to see major defoliation by early July.

Several fungicides are available to manage apple scab. However, application starts each season as buds break on trees, not now, and then is repeated as foliage develops. Refer to specific fungicide product labels to ensure the fungicide can be used either on crabapples or apples. Home orchard sprays usually contain fungicides that will manage scab.

The most effective way to manage scab on flowering crabapples is to plant scab resistant cultivars and varieties. These plants have genetic resistance and do not need fungicide protection. While flower color and ornamental features are usually the first characteristics considered when choosing flowering crabs; start with disease resistance. Then decide on other features. There are some scab resistant apples available as well.

Interested in learning more about
Horticulture in Iron County?
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