

No. 18 • September 2, 1998

Plant Clinic Closing

This is nothing new. The University of Illinois Plant Clinic closes in mid-September each year and opens again the following May. It may come as a surprise that we are only two weeks away from closing. The Plant Clinic will close for the season at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, September 15, 1998. It will reopen May 1, 1999.

Any samples received at the clinic by September 15 will be processed. Anything received after that date will not be processed. There is no funding to staff the clinic in the winter months; diagnosis will be handled through the local Extension offices without the aid of a lab. In most cases, the lab is not needed in the winter months.

Diagnostic staff becomes a skeleton crew after September 15, and it takes until the end of the month to finish all samples still in culture or needing extra help. October has already been booked with meetings, prep time, and publication deadlines. In the past we have tried to continue handling samples as time allows. This often results in ill feelings by clients who do not understand that we are trying to fit them in to whatever available time could be found. This also causes much anxiety among clinic staff, because we try to please everyone. We can no longer continue to do this.

Samples received after September 15 will be returned. REALLY! There will be no one available to handle samples at the clinic.

If you have a plant problem after the closing date, the first step should still be to contact your local Extension office. If it is then determined that you need help from a specialist, the following people may be available for telephone questions.

- Insect problems: Phil Nixon, 333-6650
- Disease problems: Nancy Pataky, 333-2478
- Tree/shrub care: Dave Williams, 333-2126 or Floyd Giles, 333-2125
- Turf care: Tom Voigt, 333-7847

- Herbaceous plant problems: Jim Schmidt, 244-5153
- Nematode questions: Dale Edwards, 244-2011

Do not send samples unless you have first spoken with a specialist and established that a sample is needed. There is no lab service after September 15. (*Nancy Pataky*)

INSECTS

White Grubs

White grubs appear to be few and scattered in central Illinois and other locations around the state. Both Japanese beetle grubs and masked chafer grubs (annual white grubs) are being found in numbers of three to four per square foot. In the Springfield area, white grubs are being found in patches of four to six per square foot, but these grubs are large—already approaching one inch in length. At least in central and northern Illinois, the adult masked chafers and Japanese beetles were present one to two weeks earlier than normal, which accounts for the larval grubs being a little larger than usual for this time of year. There are undoubtedly spots around the state where white grubs are numerous, but as yet I have not heard of any. No one attending the University of Illinois Turfgrass and Landscape Field Day on August 19 mentioned grub problems or treatable numbers.

Turf areas of northeastern Illinois, particularly on the south side of Chicago, were dry with the nonirrigated grass appearing brownish in the first half of July when Japanese beetles and masked chafers were flying and laying eggs. So be watchful for grubs in that area. North of Chicago in Lake and McHenry counties, grub numbers appear to be sparse. If you're in the northwestern portion of central Illinois near Peoria, Monmouth, and Galesburg, be watchful for spotty grub problems. In previous years with abundant early summer rainfall like we had this year, that portion of the state still tended to have some treatable turf areas.

If you have high numbers of grub-feeding wildlife, such as skunks, raccoons, or insectivorous birds, you may get damage from these animals with grub numbers as low as three to four per square foot. In these situations, treating with an insecticide that will kill the grubs fairly quickly, such as bendiocarb (Turcam) or trichlorfon (Dylox, Proxol), should effectively head off wildlife turf damage.

Insectivorous birds that will feed on white grubs include starlings, robins, cowbirds, red-winged blackbirds, thrashers, and cuckoos. When grubbing, they poke 1/2- to 3/4-inch holes through the turf. Light damage will appear as scattered dark holes across the turf. When present in flocks, the birds tend to uproot grass plants in their search for grubs. From a distance, the turf area will appear brownish and fluffy, similar to the way it would look after a light dethatching operation.

Mammals cause more impressive-looking damage. Skunks tear out three-inch-diameter divots while searching for grubs. A single skunk will commonly make about one hundred holes in a single night. These holes and their respective divots frequently are concentrated in a relatively small area, making it look from a distance as though someone has been tearing up the turf with a rototiller. Raccoons roll back the turf in sections that are a foot or more square. Moles feed primarily on earthworms and are unlikely to be attracted to an area with white grubs, although grubs do make up a small part of their diet. The champion turf destroyer in North America is the armadillo. Those of you planning on retiring to Florida, Texas, or another southern state can look forward to numerous three-inch-deep holes made by this animal. If these animals replaced their divots and watered them in, we could look at them as worthwhile biological control agents against the white grubs. (*Phil Nixon*)

Mites on Baldcypress

Mites on baldcypress have been found at The Morton Arboretum in northeastern Illinois. The damage appears as leaf yellowing and interior browning. In some cases, the entire plant has turned an orangish brown. Some of the tips are dwarfed and distorted. Looking at the foliage with a microscope, one can see a lot of discarded skins on the older, brown foliage. The distorted tips had many mites crawling on them. Control can be obtained with sprays of insecticidal soap, dicofol (Kelthane), fenbutatin-oxide (Vendex), or other miticide. Two sprays one week apart should provide control. (*Staff at The Morton Arboretum; Phil Nixon*)

Fall Webworm

Fall webworms continue to be very numerous throughout Illinois. The silk tents at branch ends of crabapple, walnut, hickory, maple, and many other trees usually contain 50 to 100 or more hairy, yellowish caterpillars. There are two races of fall webworm—one has a red head and several light-red spots on the back along with many tiny black dots; the other race has a black head and many large spots scattered along the back, giving the appearance of a black stripe from a distance.

Most colonies are very sizeable and contain large caterpillars, which makes insecticidal control of little value. Hand removal of the tents containing the caterpillars by pruning (or simply pulling) the tent off of the branch, is probably the best methods of control at this time, and removes the aesthetic injury to the tree. Attacked branches are usually alive and will produce leaves next spring if left on the tree. (*Phil Nixon*)

Woollybears

Woollybear caterpillars are starting to become common throughout the state as it gets late into the summer. Although at this time these caterpillars are mostly feeding on lambsquarter, they will soon strip these weeds of foliage and move on to flowers and other landscape plants. Yellow woollybears are covered with blond hairs, saltmarsh caterpillars have orangish red hairs, and the isabella moth larvae have bands of red and black hairs. Once they move onto desired plants, they usually are too large to be effectively controlled with insecticides. In some cases, handpicking the larvae off of the plants may be an option, but in most cases the client needs to realize that trying to control these caterpillars this late in the season is not cost effective. (*Phil Nixon*)

PLANT DISEASE

Sedum Stem Rot

The Plant Clinic has received reports of sedum that has rotted at the lower stem and crown. Initially, we had no sample to provide a positive diagnosis. However, a recently received sample, along with telephone calls from several different locations, suggests that this disease is likely occurring in at least the central part of the state.

Colletotrichum stem rot, also called sedum stem rot, is caused by an anthracnose fungus called *Colletotrichum*. Plants collapse or wilt, drawing

attention to the crowns. The lower stems of these plants appear white with mycelia and pinhead-sized fruiting bodies of the fungus. With the aid of a hand lens or dissecting scope, you can see black hairs (setae) of the fungus in these white areas. Masses of spores appear around the hairs when conditions are humid. The fungus overwinters in plant debris in the soil.

Cultural practices and environmental conditions should be reviewed to plan disease management. Moisture promotes infection, and rain and wind spread the fungal spores. Stems on crowded plants are also more likely to become diseased than well-spaced plants that dry more quickly. Sedums withstand drought very well but do not tolerate wet conditions. Suggested cultural controls are to thin plants, minimize the use of mulches around the plants, and ensure good soil drainage. Grow sedums in full sun where there is good air circulation. Destroy all infected plant parts.

We do not have a chemical listing for sedum in the University of Illinois recommendations. On other herbaceous hosts with anthracnose, we find some products with fairly general labels. Such fungicides will protect healthy plants but will not eradicate the disease. Fungicides are most effective in the spring, and will prevent overwintering spores from infecting healthy foliage. (Nancy Pataky)

Ajuga Crown Rot

Ajuga crown rot is one of the few major disease problems on this host. The fungus, *Sclerotium delphinii*, thrives in warm, wet weather, so it has done well in 1998. Sites that are particularly wet or poorly drained will have this problem more than well-drained areas.

The fungus causing this crown rot enters the plant through the roots and crown. The fungus cuts off the water supply from the roots, so the owner usually complains of a sudden wilt and death of plants. The crown and roots just below the crown are totally rotted in severe cases. Overwintering structures called sclerotia form in this tissue and in the soil around the plant. Look for hard yellow-brown to buff-colored bodies that are about 1/4 inch in diameter. These sclerotia have more of a reddish brown color with age, making them more difficult to see in the soil.

The fungus can be spread by tools, water, or in soil. Homeowners cannot eradicate this fungus from the soil, so it may be necessary to reestablish the planting in a new site with clean plants. The sclerotia can remain in the soil for several years. The only chemical we can recommend for homeowner use is thiophanate

methyl. This chemical will protect healthy plants but will not eradicate the fungus.

Disease management includes removing and discarding infected plants and the soil immediately surrounding the rootball. The idea is to remove the fungus, including sclerotia. It would be wise to plant only disease-free plants in an entirely new site, but if the infected site is the only choice, try drenching plants and soil with a registered thiophanate-methyl fungicide at planting. Follow label directions carefully. (Nancy Pataky)

Russian-Olive Cankers

Cankers occur on a great deal of the woody plant material that comes through the Plant Clinic. They are generally caused by secondary, or stress, pathogens, and are only a part of the problem. Cankers are merely a clue that something more is wrong. Refer to issue no. 18 of this newsletter for basics on cankers.

Readers in the northern part of the state, especially the Chicago area, will have noticed canker disease on Russian-olive. This species suffers from many cankers. The principal ones are fungal and are caused by *Phomopsis*, *Lasiodiplodia* (*Botryodiplodia*), *Nectria* (*Tubercularia*), and *Phytophthora*. In Illinois, the most important of these by far is *Phomopsis*. Unlike other canker fungi, *Phomopsis* is an aggressive pathogen that can attack and kill vigorous trees. Trees seriously injured by drought, hail, or ice are subject to decline and more rapid spread of the disease. The earlier drought in the Chicago area most likely predisposed many of these trees to infection.

Phomopsis-infected trees often appear ragged, with several dying or dead twigs and branches. Current-season twigs and small branches often wilt and die, with the dead, withered leaves hanging on for some time. Oval-to-elongate, depressed cankers are most evident on the large branches and trunks. Diseased bark on such cankers varies from orange-brown to dark reddish brown. Ridges often form around the canker margins. Branches girdled by the enlarging and encircling cankers wilt and die. The white sapwood beneath the cankers turns dark brown to black and extends beyond the margins. Minute, slightly raised, rounded pustules of the *Phomopsis* fungus are embedded in the dead, cankered bark.

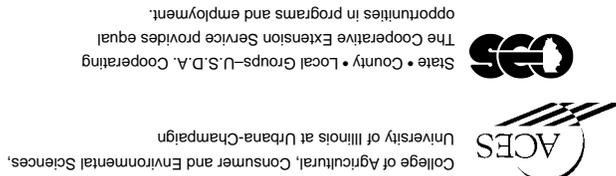
Avoid all unnecessary bark wounds because they are the pathogen's main avenue of entry. All seriously infected trees showing dieback should be cut off near the ground and destroyed, preferably by burning. More details on this disease can be found in *Report on Plant Diseases* No. 606. (Nancy Pataky)

Home, Yard and Garden Pest Newsletter is prepared by Extension specialists from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Natural History Survey. Information for this newsletter is gathered with the help of staff members, Extension field staff, and others. Karel Jacobs and Donna Danielson of The Morton Arboretum also provide information and articles.

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