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HOME & GARDEN

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Woody Ornamental Landscape Plant Tips

Culture

- Poison ivy leaves will begin to turn red this month. Don't be fooled by their color change, the leaves are still very irritating. Do not handle or shred the leaves and do not burn the vines. To control poison ivy, spray with a systemic herbicide like glyphosate or triclopyr. The herbicide moves from the foliage down to the roots where it disrupts plant growth. Even when dead, handle the vines with care using gloves as the irritant oils can still cause a rash. Throw the gloves away after handling the vines.
- Leaf/needle drop on shade trees and evergreens is common now and is caused by many factors typical of summer. Many shade trees are exhibiting other stress symptoms such as leaf scorching and early fall coloration. You may notice older leaves dropping from rhododendrons and other evergreen shrubs. This is normal for this time of year. White pine will shed older needles at this time of year.
- Early fall is a good time to transplant woody plants. However, dogwood, tulip poplar, pin oak, and evergreens should only be dug up and moved in the spring. If you plan to plant new trees this fall select high quality, slow growing species and avoid fast-growing, weak wooded trees such as Bradford pear, silver maple and Lombardy poplar. These trees produce weak branches that break or split in storms.
- Trees and shrubs should only be pruned at this time if they are dead or damaged. Wait until after all the leaves have dropped for all other corrective and cosmetic pruning. Also, be aware of large dead branches or entire dead trees that may pose a hazard to people and property. To determine if a limb is still alive look for live green buds and scrape the bark and look for green tissue. When in doubt, or when the pruning job is too dangerous, consider hiring a certified arborist to evaluate your tree.

Insects

- You may notice the browning of black locust tree leaves caused by earlier locust leaf miner feeding. This is a perennial pest that does not debilitate the trees. The damage you see now was caused earlier in the summer. Locust trees put out new growth throughout the growing season.
- The large tents of the fall webworm may be seen at the ends of tree branches. The caterpillars are done feeding but the large nests on the ends of branches are still visible. It is unsightly but causes little damage. They can be removed with a stick or pruned out. Many other kinds of caterpillars are feeding on shade trees. No controls are necessary unless severe defoliation is observed.
- Different kinds of wooly aphids have been observed on crabapple, beech and maple and can be controlled with insecticidal soap if the infestation is severe.
- Scale insects can infect many woody plants. You may notice leaves coated with black sooty mold, a fungus that grows on excess plant sap excreted by the scales. Control them with a dormant oil spray in the fall. Cottony Taxus scale can be found now on yews, camellias, holly, euonymous, hydrangea and beautyberry. You may also notice the honeydew and black sooty mold that results from the scales feeding. Dormant sprays of horticultural oil, applied in late fall, will control this pest.
- You may also notice yellow jackets congregating around trees that have large quantities of honeydew produced by scale or aphid infestations. European hornets are large yellow and brown insects that you may see stripping bark from trees or shrubs to build nests. They are attracted to lights at night.
- Lace bug feeding damage may be observed on oak, serviceberry, hawthorn, and sycamore. Lace bugs are small, flat insects that feed on leaf undersides and leave small black fecal spots. You'll notice fine white flecks or stippling on the upper leaf surface.

Lace bugs are feeding on the undersides of azalea, andromeda, rhododendrons, cottoneaster and pyracantha. They suck plant sap producing pinpoint size white flecks or stipples on the upper leaf surface. You'll also see the pest's excrement, which appears as small black dots on the undersides. You cannot do much to control them now, apply insecticidal soap or other labeled insecticide next spring when lacebugs are first noticed.

- Lots of different leaf and stem galls may be observed on shade trees. They appear in many different colors and shapes and are mostly harmless to affected trees. Galls are produced when small wasps, midges and mites feed on leaf tissue. Chemicals produced by them cause the swelling and deformation of leaf tissue. They are generally harmless and control is not necessary.
- Bagworm infestations are heavy at this time on evergreens, especially spruces. The caterpillars will soon pupate. Females will lay eggs inside the brown bags hanging from trees. Remove the bags where possible to prevent the overwintering eggs from hatching in the spring. If they cannot be removed by hand and are numerous, consider applying Bt next year between mid-June to mid-July. As a last resort, an insecticide labeled for bagworms may be applied after July 15th.
- Spruce spider mites will become active again on evergreen trees as the weather cools down. Monitor for this pest by tapping branches while holding a piece of white paper underneath. Look for moving specks. They can be controlled with ultra-fine horticultural oil.
- Cottony camellia scale can be found now on camellias, holly, euonymous, hydrangea and beautyberry. You may also notice the honeydew and black sooty mold that results from the scales feeding. Dormant sprays of horticultural oil, applied in late fall, will control this pest.

Disease

- Wood rotting organisms produce conks, which resemble fleshy, shelf-like structures on tree trunks. Affected trees may be suffering from extensive wood decay and should be inspected by a licensed arborist.
- Powdery mildew is the common name for the disease and symptoms caused by a closely related group of fungi. It affects most shade trees such as oak, sycamore and tulip poplar as well as, crepe myrtle, lilac, euonymous and many other popular plants. These fungi grow on the upper and lower leaf surfaces, young stems, and shoot tips of plants. Affected plants turn white or light blue-gray. The optimum conditions for powdery mildew development are warm days followed by cool, humid nights. Dry daytime weather allows spores to spread to other plants on air currents. Powdery mildew can be prevented or reduced next year by spraying a summer rate of horticulrural oil on the foliage before or as soon as mildew appears.
- Continue spraying roses with a labeled fungicide if they are susceptible to black spot disease. Powdery mildew is a late season disease that infects flower buds and can cause petal distortion next spring.