

What's Bugging Us Now?

Spring is almost here- I hope! So what do we have to look forward to in the world of our trees and shrubs?

Lets look at last year for a moment- a cool wet spring followed by a long very hot and dry summer. Two seasonal conditions that make things difficult for our green friends.

The cool wet spring is prime for disease propagation on many flowering, fruit and shade trees. In the landscape it is often quite hard to treat for these diseases unless you treat preventatively. In other words before the disease is evident. Once the symptoms of the disease begin to show, it is too late. Rarely are single occurrences of foliar diseases fatal but over time they can increase the stress on trees and shrubs. Most plant material have their own methods of limiting the effects of the disease.

In the case of the Ash tree which is susceptible to Ash Anthracnose, the tree will leaf out normally in the spring and then begin to lose leaves. The leaves are characterized as being deformed often with large necrotic or black areas on them. The tree drops the leaves to prevent the disease, a fungus from entering it's system. In 99% of the cases, the tree will produce a second growth flush and by memorial day, all is forgotten. In the case of Ash Anthracnose as well as most foliar diseases, good sanitation practices are essential for reducing the spread of the disease. Raking up the fallen leaves and composting them is perfectly acceptable. There are chemical treatments available for many disease organisms.

Moving on to the long hot and very dry summer- everything living needs water to survive. Many trees have the ability to go into dormancy to preserve their resources. In essence they shut down when conditions are too harsh for normal plant growth. While they do shut down they are still under a great deal of stress. They do continue to use their internal resources and in some cases, deplete those stores of sugars and carbohydrates. This is especially true of older more mature trees and those under stress from other external sources such as disease or mechanical injury.

We do not expect to see the full extent of damage or injury from the drought for two to three years. Many evergreen trees are already showing signs of drought injury and many will not recover. Last fall we saw a marked increase in amount of older needles turning yellow and dropping from evergreens. Some of this needle drop is normal but last fall, it appeared excessive. Fortunately the newer growing portions of the trees remained healthy and viable.

What can we do? Now may be a good time to thin the herd- if you have sick or hazardous trees, consider removing them.

Watch the weather, be pro-active and begin watering high value plant material before it is dry. Keeping soil moist is a whole lot easier than getting dry soil wet. Use gray water to water plants, that is water such as rinse water from washing machines, rain barrel water or excess bath water. A little soap will not hurt, in fact it can actually help get the water into the ground as it breaks the surface tension of the soil. Use soaker hoses to get the water into the ground. A considerable amount of water is lost through evaporation if you use an aerial sprinkler.

What else is going on? Bugs! Yes, we must still be vigilant and keep an eye out for the following insect pests:

Emerald Ash Borer is coming! More than two thirds of the counties in Pennsylvania are now under quarantine restrictions meaning it is unlawful to move firewood and other wood products out of those counties. It is also unlawful to move restricted nursery stock. So far, southeastern Pennsylvania is not included in this quarantine and there have been no reported sightings of the Emerald Ash Borer. If you have specimen Ash trees on your property, contact your tree care professional to discuss prevention options.

Japanese Cedar Longhorn Beetle is here! This is another Asian import that attacks plants in the Cedar family. The primary victims are Arborvitae, Cryptomeria, Chamaecyparis and Juniper. This group of plants makes up a sizable portion of the urban landscape in our area. What can be done? Inspect, inspect, inspect! This insect is difficult to detect and is most often noted when symptoms begin to appear. At this stage, destruction of the host plant is often the best way to eradicate the pest. Destruction means cutting down the tree or shrub and reducing it to small chips. There is currently research underway to see what can be done to prevent infestation by this insect. Use of some systemic insecticides shows some promise- stay tuned!

Viburnum Leaf Beetle. The Viburnum is one of most heavily utilized landscape and native plant in the area. This pest eats the leaves and destroys new shoots from egg laying activities. It is moving in our direction from the northwest part of the state and New England. There are some species that are more susceptible to damage than others. It appears that the fuzzy leaf varieties are not the preferred food of this critter. Smooth leaf varieties are, avoid planting smooth leaf Viburnums. There are many chemicals labeled for control of leaf feeding insects, as always READ THE LABEL and follow the directions to the letter!

As a professional arborist, these are the things I am watching at them moment along with all of other more “regular” insect and disease pests.

Monitoring your landscape and contacting knowledgeable professionals for assistance is one of the best ways to ensure that your home and investment are protected.