ORNAMENTALS

Summer Stresses on Pine, Spruce and Fir

This year’s heat and drought has been tough on trees, especially evergreens. Spruce, fir and pine are not well adapted to Kansas conditions, and high stress years like this one can lead to decline and death. There are natural conditions that can make the tree look like it is dying that actually are not harmful.

If needles on the inside of the tree turn brown, but those on the outer branches remain green, the tree is going through natural needle drop. Natural needle drop does not harm the health of the tree and is a normal process as two- to four-year old needles are shed. Drought may increase needle drop but in itself does not harm the tree. In some cases all the needles on a branch are turning color. On pines, this may be due to pine wilt, a fatal disease found primarily on Scots and Austrian pine. Other diseases may cause similar symptoms. Often it is best to take a sample to your local K-State Research and Extension office to be diagnosed. This year, the cause of many evergreen problems is not disease, but stress. The heat and drought of this summer may have stressed trees to the point they may lose branches or die.

To tell if a stressed tree will survive, check to see if the branch with the browning needles is alive. Scrape off a small area of branch bark with a sharp knife. There should be green tissue immediately under the bark. This green cambium layer is quite thin with the underlying woody tissue being white. If there is no green, the branch is dead.

Also check the ends of branches. Dry, brittle twigs are a sign that at least that part of the tree is dead. Dead branches should be removed. Major branch removal may destroy the aesthetics of the tree, making tree removal the only viable option.

To reduce stress, concentrate on good watering. During dry weather, including winter, water trees
to a depth of at least 10 inches, with deeper watering preferred. Check water depth by pushing a long screwdriver, metal rod, or wooden dowel into the soil. It will stop when it reaches dry soil. During hot, dry weather, trees may need to be watered once a week. During a dry winter when temperatures are above freezing, water trees once a month. (WU)

Are Crabapples Safe to Eat?

Crabapples are safe to consume as long as you don’t eat too many of them. Actually, the only difference between crabapples and apples is the size of the fruit. By definition, crabapples have fruit that are 2 inches or less in diameter, and apples are more than 2 inches in diameter. By this definition, most of the apples grown from seed will be crabapples. The fruiting apples are grafted. So did people ever plant crabapples from seed? Of course they did. Just think of Johnny Appleseed. But those apples were normally used for jelly, applesauce, and cider and not for fresh eating.

There is one other caveat with using crabapples from a tree in the landscape. Make sure the tree hasn't been sprayed as an ornamental with a pesticide that isn't labeled for fruit tree apples. If it has, then the fruit should not be used. (WU)

Plants for Late Season Bloom

Landscapes are often drab this time of year. You can add interest to your home by planting shrubs that flower later in the growing season. Consider one or more of the following.

**Rose of Sharon** (Hibiscus syriacus) is a tall shrub that produces single or double flowers. Colors range from white to red, purple or violet, or combinations, depending on the variety.

**Crapemyrtle** (Lagerstroemia indica) are dwarf-to-tall shrubs or trees. They are not reliably winter hardy in Kansas and often die back to the ground. Crapemyrtle flowers on new wood, so plants pruned (or killed) to the ground while dormant in late winter or early spring will bloom later the same year. Flower color varies from white, pink, to purple or deep red on different plants.

**Caryopteris x clandonensis** is known as bluebeard, blue-spirea, blue-mist shrub, or caryopteris. It usually is found with blue flowers, but some cultivars have a bluish-violet to violet flower color. Plants are usually cut back in late winter or early spring. Flowers are borne on the current
season’s growth.

**Sweet Autumn clematis** (*Clematis terniflora*) is a vigorous vine with large masses of small, white flowers that have a wonderful fragrance. Be careful with this one; it can easily outgrow its bounds. It is often a good idea to cut it back to the ground in early spring.

**Davidiana clematis** (*Clematis heracleifolia var. Davidiana*) is a bush-type clematis with small but interesting violet-blue flowers. Female plants bear interesting fluffy seed heads into the winter. This clematis needs to be cut back to the ground each year to help maintain the shape of the plant.

**The PeeGee hydrangea** (*Hydrangea paniculata Grandiflora*) is a somewhat coarse plant that develops large clusters of white flowers. It can be trained into a tree-like form. (WU)

### FLOWERS

**Peonies May Be Cut Back Now**

If peony foliage is spotted and no longer attractive, cut it back now. Peonies are essentially dormant by September 1 even though leaves may still be green. Cut leaves off close to the ground and compost or discard. (WU)

### PESTS

**Woody Plants and Lace Bug Damage**

We are seeing a number of tree species with brown or bronze leaves caused by lace bug damage. Woody plants affected this year include oaks, hawthorns, cotoneaster, and sycamore. Lace bugs are small insects with wings that resemble lace under magnification. All stages of the insect develop on the undersides of leaves, where they suck the sap. Adults are about 1/8-inch long. Under heavy infestations, stippling damage becomes evident. The leaves lose their green color and become pale, and undersides may become speckled with brownish-black excrement spots and cast nymphal skins. Healthy trees will not be damaged
by lace bug this late in the season. The trees had plenty of time during the spring and summer to make the food needed to survive the winter. Control measures are not recommended. (WU)

**Bagworms, Is It Too Late to Spray?**

By mid-August, most bagworms have finished feeding and retreated into their bags. Insecticides will not penetrate the thick, leathery, silk-lined pouches.

To determine whether larvae have finished feeding, examine the bags. Those containing feeding larvae can be identified by the greenish, freshly chewed foliage glued to the bags. Bags are open at the head end, allowing larvae to poke out and continue feeding. They are attached to the foliage by several weak strands of silk (Figure A) and can be pulled off easily.

When larvae have finished feeding, they move to the twig or branch. They produce a heavy silken sheet (Figure B) that firmly attaches the bag to the host plant. These bags are more secure and difficult to remove.

Bagworms do not complete development simultaneously, so spraying for bagworms is not out of the question. Determining factors should be the condition and appearance of the host and the number of bagworms actively feeding.

If the tree has a full appearance and good color, and there are only a few bagworms actively feeding, do not spray.

Even if a tree has a thin, anemic appearance, check the condition of the bags. If most of the bags are worn and gray, they are the 2010 bags from which bagworms emerged. There may be only a few current year bagworms because, after consuming the most tender foliage, most larvae abandoned the tree and moved to adjacent trees to continue feeding on lush foliage. Spraying the tree is not recommended.

Even if most bags are this year’s, do not rush to spray a thin, anemic tree. Check to see if most bags are closed and attached with thick silken ties. If this is the case, do not spray the tree.

Apply insecticide only if trees appear heavily damaged and bagworms are actively feeding. Check trees again next year to prevent further bagworm damage. (BB)

**Editor’s Note:** This article was edited from one Dr. Bauernfeind wrote for the “Kansas Insect Newsletter.” The original article included more text and images and may be found at: [http://www.entomology.ksu.edu/~doc4902.ashx](http://www.entomology.ksu.edu/~doc4902.ashx) (WU)
MISCELLANEOUS

Harvesting and Roasting Sunflower Seeds

Sunflowers are usually ready to be harvested beginning in mid-September and into October. Seed heads can ripen on the plant, but they will need protection from birds. Try covering the heads with a paper sack or cheesecloth once the petals start turning brown. Use a twist tie or rubber band to secure the covering. This will not only help keep birds out but will prevent ripened seeds from dropping out of the head.

Check for maturity by looking for the following signs:

– Florets in the brown center of the flower disk should be shriveled.
– Heads should have turned down.
– The backside of the head should be lemon yellow.

The ultimate check, of course, is to pull a few seeds to see if they have turned black with white stripes, the typical color. Empty shells usually indicate a lack of pollination earlier in the year.

If heads are to remain uncovered, harvest when a few seeds start turning black and white. The flavor will not be good as when seeds are allowed to ripen on the plants, but fewer seeds will be lost. Cut the heads and place in a paper sack. Some people prefer to cut the heads with about a foot of stem attached and hang them upside down in a dry, well-ventilated area. A paper bag or cheesecloth can be placed over the heads to prevent seeds from dropping as they dry. Seeds can be easily removed from dry heads by rubbing gently.

Roasting Seeds

Raw, mature seeds may be prepared at home by covering unshelled seeds with salted water (2 quarts of water to 1/4 to 2 cup salt). Bring to a boil and simmer 2 hours, or soak in the salt solution overnight. Drain and dry on absorbent paper.

Put sunflower seeds in a shallow pan in a 300-degree F oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until golden brown, stirring occasionally. Take seeds out of the oven and add 1 teaspoon of melted butter or margarine, or cooking oil per 1 cup of seeds if they are to be eaten immediately. Stir to coat. Put on an absorbent towel. Salt to taste. (WU)
Pokeweed

A number of people have asked the name of the weed with the large leaves and purple-black berries that hang in a cluster. This perennial is known as pokeweed. All parts of this plant are poisonous, especially the roots. Signs of poisoning include abdominal cramps, diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, drowsiness and difficulty in breathing. One of the toxins found in pokeweed is the protein lectin, which can cause abnormalities in white blood cells.

Surprisingly, young leafy springtime shoots are sometimes eaten after thorough cooking. Though cooking eliminates most of the toxins, there is still a danger of being poisoned from handling and preparing the shoots as well as ingesting improperly cooked plants.

Berries can be attractive to children. Cut down and discard pokeweed that might come into contact with kids. This plant is a perennial. You may want to spray it with a herbicide next year before it is large enough to be attractive to children. (WU)

Controlling Grassy Sandbur

Hot, dry years often lead to problems with grassy sandbur. Mature plants are difficult to control with products that won’t hurt the lawn. Glyphosate (Roundup) works well but kills whatever it hits. The best control for grassy sandbur is to use a preemergence herbicide in the spring before the plant comes up. However, not all preemergence herbicides are effective. The two products that are effective are oryzalin and pendimethalin.

Oryzalin is sold under the trade names of Surflan and Weed Impede. It can be used on all warm-season grasses as well as tall fescue. It should not be used on cool-season grasses other than tall fescue such as Kentucky bluegrass. Apply oryzalin about April 15 when redbud trees approach full bloom.

Pendimethalin is sold commercially as Pendulum as well as several other names. On the homeowner side, it is sold as Scotts Halts. Pendimethalin is best applied as a split application with the first half applied about April 15 and the second about June 1. Alternatively, make the first application when redbud trees approach full bloom and the second six weeks later. (WU)

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