

Every so often, I devote my column to a situation that seems widespread, what I often refer to as the question of the day. Today's topic focuses on one of those situations. For the past week, innumerable samples, all with the same concern, were brought to my attention. What is it, will it hurt my tree and how do I get rid of it were the questions I heard repeatedly. I also received endless phone calls involving the same concern. With such extensive interest, allow me to share with you another of Mother Nature's pageantry, this time in the category of rots and spots.

This particular fungal disease is affecting ash trees; thus, it is aptly named, ash rust. Ash trees belong to the genus *Fraxinus* which includes green, white, black and autumn purple, all of which are potential hosts for this pathogen. My guess is if you own an ash tree and live in the Kearney area, chances are your tree or trees are now infected. The good news about this predicament is rarely will this disease be life-threatening to the tree, and experts often suggest taking no special control measures to curb its spread.



The presence of this fungus is noticeable. Examine the leaves of your ash tree, and if you notice bright golden-orange, fuzzy lesions, your tree is infected. These strange looking anomalies occur on the leaves, petioles of the leaves and even on green twigs. Often the disease causes distorted shapes in the leaves and petioles. Sometimes so many lesions occur on a

leaf that they cause premature leaf drop.

This disease is caused by the fungus *Puccinia sparganioides*. Like other rust diseases, typical symptoms include the presence of bright orange pustules. The spores of the fungus, yellow-orange in color, appear over the swollen areas. This

disease is similar in habit to that of cedar/apple rust. Two host plants are involved. The spores produced on the ash leaves are incapable of re-infecting ash, but they infect marsh and cord grasses, the alternate hosts of this rust fungus. The fungus overwinters on these grasses and infects ash trees during wet weather in spring.

Although the disease is rarely life-threatening, repeated ash rust infections can weaken trees, especially those growing near wetlands where cord grass and marsh grass grow. Weakened trees are then more susceptible to insect pests and winter damage.

Valuable trees can be protected from severe infections with timely fungicide treatments. During wet springs, begin the fungicide applications as the buds break open and repeat according to label instructions until the foliage is fully developed.

A few fungicides used to treat this disease include Bayleton, Chlorothalonil, Propiconazole and Thiophanate-methyl. These are the names of the active fungicide ingredient and do not refer to commercial or trade names.

Having read this report, you may surmise that treating for ash rust now would be ineffective. Like most other fungal diseases, they are best controlled through preventive measures rather than curative. Fortunately, as summer unfolds, and dry, hot weather occurs, the spread of this fungus will diminish.

For now, all I can say is **try** to enjoy these beautiful, fuzzy, orange pustules—just another example of Mother Nature's pageantry.