



Natural Needle Drop of Evergreens

If you have evergreen trees or shrubs on your property, you have no doubt experienced some needle drop in past years due to drought stress. It is also necessary to understand evergreens naturally shed some of their needles every year, regardless of the weather conditions.

All evergreen trees keep their needles for more than a year – that’s what makes them evergreen! However, as these needles age, new ones are continuously being grown, the old needles toward the main trunk are shed. Some trees, such as Eastern White Pine, shed their needles every two years. Others, Ponderosa pine for example, hold their needles longer, and shed them every 3-5 years.

Natural needle drop is especially evident on white pine because of the tree’s open growing habit, and relatively loose needle arrangement. On any evergreen, you might notice these older needles turning yellow first, before they drop. This is also completely normal, and nothing that needs treating.

How do you tell if what your trees are experiencing is natural needle drop, or something else? First of all, you should regularly inspect your landscape for changes that are occurring to the plants and turf. By simply walking through and just looking at the plants, you can often catch insect infestations or disease at the early stages of their development – which is the easiest and best time to treat! If you see insects covering a branch that you have never noticed before, realize that it’s not necessarily bad. It might be a beneficial insect, preying on a predatory insect! If you are unsure of what type of insect it is, feel free to bring me a sample, or email a picture. Treat possible disease the same way. A spot here and there on leaves might not be anything serious. But if they seem to spread week after week, or cause other symptoms, it might be something you will need to deal with. Sometimes that’s as easy as cutting off a branch, and no chemical needs to be introduced to the environment.

Drought stress on evergreens is mostly commonly seen as browning of the needle tips, especially those on the ends of branches, or the higher parts of a tree. Those top branches are the ones that will suffer the most in drought type conditions. Natural needle drop is just that – natural, and nothing to be concerned about.



Photo: J. Hahn, University of Minnesota

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