

## Evergreen Issues

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The most common question to Extension horticulturists right now is What's wrong with my evergreen? Heat, high winds and drought, often combined with poor tree watering practices from automatic lawn irrigation systems and excess nitrogen fertilization, have left many conifers stressed.

Evergreen shrubs like Boxwood and Japanese Yew, and trees such as white pine and Arborvitae are beginning to show winter dessication injury. And because stressed trees are more susceptible to diseases, we are seeing an increase in *Cytospora* canker in spruce, *Sphaeropsis* tip blight in pines and other diseases.

Before doing anything, identify the problem. In some cases, the only thing that can be done is provide the best growing conditions possible to help a tree recover. In other cases, a pesticide application may help if applied at the correct time. Chances are some evergreens will be damaged too much to recover and removal and replacement will be needed.

If an evergreen looked fine going into fall and winter but is now uniformly turning brown on the south or west side of the tree, this is most likely winter dessication injury. Scotch pine that are beginning to appear dull or gray green are likely dying from pine wilt.

Symptoms of cankers on spruce and pine will be scattered branches dying throughout the tree. With *Cytospora* canker, a grayish blue resin that oozes from cankers may be noticed on spruce branches or as drips on the trunk. If needles of Austrian or Ponderosa pine are brown and hanging down on affected branches, check the bottom of pine cones for black specks. These are a signs of *Sphaeropsis* blight.

Winter dessication is common as drought conditions last summer and fall caused many plants to go into winter stressed. That was followed by no snow, some above average temperature days, and many high wind days. These extreme conditions affected even correctly watered plants.

During winter, plants continue to lose moisture from tissues, especially evergreen leaves. Moisture is not replaced during winter as roots are not functioning in cold or frozen soils. Eventually, plant tissues lose enough moisture to dry out completely and die, but do not turn brown until late winter into spring.

For winter dessication and spruce cankers, there is not much to be done other than water trees deeply as needed, place a 2 to 4-inch layer of organic mulch, like wood chips, around trees, and avoid fertilizing with nitrogen. Wait until June 1 to prune damaged branches or branch tips to see if new growth occurs.

Fungicides can be applied to pines for *Sphaeropsis* tip blight to prevent new infections on healthy branches. Ideally, the first application would have been made the third week of April and a second one 7 to 14 days later. Fungicides applied in May can still help reduce infections. Products recommended are thiophanate-methyl, propiconazole and Bordeaux mixture. Follow label directions for application.

To help identify evergreen issues, clear photos of the entire tree and close up photos of symptoms can be emailed to [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu).