

Current Plant Issues

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Trees dropping leaves, leaf yellowing, spotted leaves and curled or twisted leaves. These are some of the plant questions Nebraska Extension is being asked about.

If hackberry, linden, or other trees are dropping green or yellowing leaves, this is most likely natural and not a concern. Trees sometimes drop leaves in June. We did not have late spring frosts which typically kills some leaves. We've also had rainfall promoting lush, succulent growth.

If a tree produces an abundance of leaves, it is not unusual for some to drop off in June. If the leaves have no spots, blighted areas or distortion, leaf drop is natural; especially if the trees crown appears full, not thin, and has no dead branches. Some leaves will turn yellow before they drop.

If leaves have spots or blighted areas, in most cases this would be a minor fungal disease. At this time, it is late to apply a fungicide or not feasible on large trees. On otherwise healthy plants, minor leaf diseases often need no control. Affected trees retain enough leaves for photosynthesis or they develop new leaves. And leaves with spots are still doing the job of photosynthesis.

Some leaf spot diseases we're seeing include orange spots on ornamental pear and crabapples which are rust diseases. Black spots with feathery edges on the tops of rose leaves known as black spot. And blotchy brown areas, often along leaf veins, in maple, ash and other trees known as anthracnose.

Most fungi require moisture on leaf surfaces, and a certain temperature before they can infect a leaf. Cool, rainy weather provided conditions needed for fungal infections. As weather becomes dryer, fewer infections will occur. Most diseases are also host specific, meaning they won't spread to other plants.

For example, fungi that causes rust in pear is different than fungi causing crabapple rust. The same is true for anthracnose fungi. The one infecting maple is different from the one infecting ash. If there is concern a disease will spread from one plant to others if not controlled, this is very unlikely to happen and not a reason to use a pesticide.

If fungicide treatment is chosen, it would be better to wait until next spring and then only apply if a disease causes unacceptable leaf drop this year. Most fungicides do not cure infections or kill fungi. They work best if they cover leaf surfaces prior to infection to prevent a disease. If fungicides are used, select those labeled for the plant being treated and follow directions for rate and repeat applications.

If a smaller plant has mostly yellow leaves and is in a low area of the landscape or planted in poorly drained soil, leaf yellowing may be due to a saturated soil. Too wet of soil leads to lack of root function or root loss leading to leaf yellowing. Allow the soil to dry so root growth and function can resume. Be sure lawn irrigation systems are turned off and not hitting plants other than turfgrass.

Curling, cupped or distorted leaves are usually caused by herbicide drift. A sign that herbicide is the cause is more than one type of plant in the landscape is affected. When this happens, the cause tends to be chemical or environmental. Remember, diseases and many insects are host specific.

Most trees, shrubs and perennials will survive a drift situation, depending on what the herbicide is and how much contacted the plant. When edible plants like vegetables and fruits are affected, we cannot say the produce is or isn't safe to eat. It is up to the plant owner to decide if they will eat the produce. It might be best to play it safe.

With any plant problem, positive diagnosis of the cause is important, especially before a control method is used. Nebraska Extension offices in each county can help with diagnosis. Questions and photos may also be submitted on-line at <https://digitaldiagnostics.unl.edu/>.