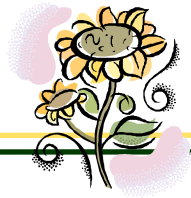


# Spider Mites Are A Common Hot Weather Plant Problem



MORGAN TREE SERVICE, INC.  
THE "VITACARE" COMPANY

## Tree Times

I have already run into several properties this summer that have important oak trees exhibiting moderate infestations of the Twospotted Spider Mite (*Tetranychus urticae*). These tiny critters, less than 1/50" (0.4mm) long, are more closely related to spiders than to true insects. They are so small they are difficult to see with the unaided eye, although they can be observed with a 10X lense.

The Twospotted Spider Mite is a prolific webbing producer, spanning fine silky strands from leaf to leaf and twig to twig. Severe infestations can cover much of a plants surface with their fine webbing. In the early stages these webs can often be mistaken for the webs of small spiders. Mites damage plant foliage by a piercing/sucking process. The leaf surface collapses around the insertion point. First comes a yellow (chlorotic) spot followed by a gray or bronze speckled appearance.

The best way to detect their presence (aside from the obvious webbing) is to hold a white card under a suspect branch while slapping the branch surfaces with your hand. If present, mites will be dislodged from the plant surfaces and can be detected crawling around on the contrasting card surface. Look closely. You can use a pencil to circle suspect spots. If the spots crawl out of

your circles you probably have a mite problem.

Mites thrive and do their work most destructively in hot dry conditions. They survive from season to season in the soil or on plant parts. Females can lay up to twenty eggs per day on the leaf surfaces of host

*Mites thrive and do their work most destructively in hot dry conditions.*



plants and individuals can mature from eggs to adults in as little as five (5) days, thereby opening the possibility of appearance of high populations in a short time when conditions are right. A severe infestation can overtake even large plants

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(trees) in short order, destroying the leaves and devastating the plant's vitality, sometimes even killing it.

Mites can infest house plants and small orna-

mentals as well as large ones. Adequate irrigation and/water availability is an effective deterrent to heavy infestations. When feasible, a stream of water can sometimes wash populations from the plant. For small jobs, a homeowner spray concoction of half water/half rubbing alcohol can also be effective.

Biological controls such as lacewings and ladybeetles can also significantly reduce populations. So some insects can be good to have around. In fact, overuse of insecticides can sometimes be implicated as contributory in the spread of mites by wiping out their natural insect predators. Nonetheless, for large plants or in the case of heavy infestations, a systemic miticide such as Talstar, Kelthane or Abamectin (Avid or Abacide) may be necessary for adequate control.

So if one morning this month or next you walk

outside and see what looks like fine spider webs in your oak or your Japanese maple, you may have a problem with the Twospotted Spider Mite. Do the "card check" and if it's positive, take appropriate action.

# From My Journal: *Ephemerata*



The last weeks have been hot, muggy and the kind of weather that many folks I talk to often describe as oppressive. I've always been outside much of the time, so these days I find myself each morning checking to be sure I have my water jug, a terry towel and several bandanas with me when I leave the office to drive around the city looking at trees. Yet at the same time it seems it was just last week that I was lamenting and grumbling under my breath about the lingering cold and incessant gray rain that seemed to be holding off an anticipated coming of a vibrant green and a caressing warmth that had always been part and parcel with the Camelot-like Mays and Junes of many of my boyhood fantasies. I wanted it again so badly. Is that naïve? In my mind it was the same kind of May and June that I also recognized when I would stare for long moments at many of the painted scenes by Norman Rockwell.

So I think that maybe the image I've been holding on to was more some hard-to-define longing than any real, any actual memory of a previous season or seasons. It was more a kind of nostalgic- spiritual thing. I grew up as a boy right here in the mid-south and it was hot then as well, and with far fewer air-conditioned retreats in those days. So I think mine is not the sort of nostalgia for any past experience so much as something recognized *through* them, like a subtle yet persistent hoping for something I had only once dreamed about and now only once in a blue moon still do at least faintly imagine. And maybe the decreasing frequency of my more recent "dreaming" is only because that too

has fallen victim to my adult busyness, to productivity and to the value I place on a so-called logical mind. It may be my "mature" grasp of reality that professes to know better that in fact habitually brushes such things away as so much nonsense. But if that is so, it is also a somehow sad and disappointed knowing, a knowing and a brushing away that tweaks me every time like an incrementally induced but fatal loss or diminishment.

I get the same kind of visceral flashes almost every time I smell white paste or watermelon or honey-

And on top of all that, the whole thing can be somehow embarrassing even to try to talk about, always giving me the notion that I'm beginning to sound like I'm losing it; you know, about ready for the psycho ward. Yet. . .well, I also suspect that the experience is more widespread and common than we might think, yet one that most of us seldom quite know how to talk about, and so usually don't. And if that's true, is it because we all really do hold something in common, something unique to just us and almost like a higher level of species *memory*, a memory of an unusual sort that most folks would not even technically define as memory at all?

Of course, these rare glimmerings don't often come while you're wiping the sweat from your brow and trying to straighten your aching back while bemoaning the heat. But they do come, sneaking up on you like a little surprise at the oddest of moments. And when they do, like fine sea sand, they also immediately begin slipping through your fingers.

Dreamlike, they are impossible to hold, no matter our efforts to do so. Yet somehow we still have within us the genetic wiring to occasionally pick them up, like a nearly forgotten ability to receive very weak, garbled, and intermittent radio signals from a far country, ephemeral revelations brought in on seriously weakened batteries that are still trying to tell us something about our deepest selves, what we're made for and who we really are.

*But if that is so, it is also a somehow sad and disappointed knowing.*



*But they do come, sneaking up on you like a little surprise at the oddest of moments. And when they do, like fine sea sand, they also immediately begin slipping through your fingers.*

suckle. Now so far as I know there's no particular reason that I should be a fan of white paste, yet the smell of it carries something else to me that must once have existed in me and alongside of that smell. It can also come with the staccato croakings of bullfrogs at dusk or with the sudden blinking of fireflies over a green summer pasture that has turned dark in the fading light. In that instant it's somehow like going back to a place that I have never been to. Is the right word *déjà vu*? I'm not quite sure.

# Bagworms on Juniper, Cedar, Arborvitae and Spruce

## A Summertime Issue



Sometimes, in some situations, the subject content of these newsletters can be just a bit late for the most effective response to a current problem or infestation. After four to five years of writing these articles you'd think that I could anticipate this sort of thing and get out info in a more timely manner. But the quarterly nature of

closely associated with cedar and juniper, they can also infest arborvitae, spruce and occasionally pine in this area. They are easy to detect because at maturity and even before full size they look like brown Christmas tree ornaments,

*While bagworms are most closely associated with cedar and juniper, they can also infest arborvitae, spruce and occasionally pine in this area.*

shaped almost like a teardrop, dangling from the branches and branch tips.

ment (by topical sprays or injection) is necessary, early application always works better, when the bags are still one half inch or less in length. A thorough spray coverage is important to good control. By August, spraying for this problem can be only marginally effective.

If the number of bags on your tree is small and you can easily reach them, manual re-

*If the number of bags on your tree is small and you can easily reach them, manual removal can be very effective.*



Photo by Michael Masiuk

The "brown ornament" is actually the bag or cocoon that houses the growing larvae of a moth. As time passes the bags grow in size, thickness and toughness. The developing larvae emerge to feed on the plant needles and in heavy infestations can seriously defoliate the host. Because coniferous plants grow



slower than broadleaves and deciduous trees, they are more susceptible to permanent damage from successive infestations. As the larvae grow, the spun "bags" provide an increasing level of protection against chemical treatment. Therefore, if chemical treat-

ment can be very effective. By the time you get this letter, you will likely have already noticed the problem and the resultant damage if it has been there at all. But education, like some other

things, is better late than never.

the publication coupled with the unpredictability of the appearance and/or severity of particular problems continues to make that tricky for me.

Bagworms are like that. Some years they're bad and some years they're not. This year I've seen more than a few. While bagworms are most

## Did You Know . . .

. . . that a "balanced fertilizer", such as the commonly used 13-13-13, may not always be the ultimate answer to a perceived tree/plant performance concern. Many things other than mineral deficiencies can be causal in less than stellar plant performance and/or appearance. Just a few of these can include

- a) water, too much or too little (see article on page 4).
- b) pH imbalance which affects how the mineral properties of the soil can be utilized by the plant, even when they may otherwise be plentiful in the soil.
- c) cankers and vascular disruptive issues,
- d) disease or a hard-to-spot insect presence such as scale or
- e) limited or poor soil conditions.

Some minimal detective work can often pay big dividends and is always preferable to jumping to unwarranted conclusions and implementing ineffectual remedies. A soil test can frequently be great help in zeroing in on real issues as well as guiding any necessary plant fertilization or soil amendment program. Because soil changes are not usually rapid, a soil report can be good for several years.





# It's Summertime! Water Your Trees!



Summer's here again and so I hope I can be forgiven for repeating myself on a critically important seasonal subject. As my headline says, it's about the importance of supplemental water during these long, hot and potentially dry days and weeks now upon us and ahead. Once we get past the rain-loaded frontal systems that characterize the

Unfortunately most irrigation systems that are installed primarily for lawns, shrubberies and ornamental beds are not set to properly water large established trees. In fact, frequent applications (e.g. every other day) of short periods of water (e.g. fifteen to twenty minutes) can do as much harm as good for your big trees. In clay soils that need to breathe and aerate, too little water applied too often is tantamount to placing a plastic bag over your head, cinching it at the neck and expecting you to do just fine when you breathe. With this kind of water application, the top inch or so that gets wet and stays wet effectively blocks gas exchange and re-aeration of the soil. Roots can rot.

when properly placed, very often apply water too rapidly, especially if they are on a slope. As a result, much of it is wasted. And whatever you use, try to keep the water off the trunks as much as possible. Not much can be taken up there and extended periods of wetness at the collar, especially when it is covered with vines, dense shrubberies, etc., can also encourage the beginning of various root rot diseases.



spring and fall seasons, large trees can give off (transpire) more water than is available. This means that they need our temporary help. Big trees that are not easily replaced can be stressed to a point of no return, making them susceptible to a plethora of other trouble.

Okay you say. I've got an irrigation system that takes care of that. Well, maybe not.



Instead, water only weekly during periods of less than an inch of rain. Apply water slowly in a given area for two-three hours, allowing it to soak in rather than run off downhill or into the gutter. Soaker hoses set out in circles in the **outer (radial) half of the dripline** work well for this purpose. Sprinklers, even

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