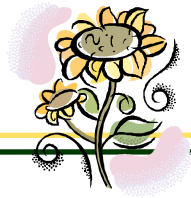


Spider Mites Are A Common Hot Weather Plant Problem



MORGAN TREE SERVICE, INC.
THE "VITACARE" COMPANY

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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

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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.