

# ORNAMENTALS

• H O T L I N E •

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Issue 3

## INSECTS

Gregory Hoover  
Ornamental Extension Entomologist

HEMLOCK RUST MITE, *Nalepella tsugifoliae*, is an eriophyid mite that commonly attacks the foliage of Canadian hemlock, *Tsuga canadensis* and infests the needles of fir, spruce, and yew. This native pest is active in late winter and early spring as well as in the fall. Found on both the upper and lower needle surfaces, damage caused by this pest is often misdiagnosed as a nutrient deficiency, winter injury, spruce spider mite injury, or drought stress.

Clusters of tiny, round eggs may be seen at the base of host plant needles during the winter with a dissecting stereomicroscope. Nymphs hatch from overwintering eggs usually in mid-March well before those of the spruce spider mite. Populations of this mite buildup quickly in the spring. They decrease during the summer and increase in the fall when eggs are deposited. I sometimes use a turfgrass analogy when describing the time of year that this pest is active. I refer to this eriophyid mite as a "cold season" pest because of its early season activity.

When many mites are present, damage from their piercing-sucking mouthparts gives needles a dusty, olive appearance. To distinguish rust mite damage from a nutrient deficiency, look closely at damaged needles with a hand lens. Tiny marks that run parallel to the midrib will be present on a rust mite-damaged needle. These marks won't be apparent if symptoms are due to a nutrient problem.

To effectively manage this key pest, treat infested plants by selecting a registered formulation of horticultural oil applied according to label directions from mid-March through April and again in September, if indicated.

## DISEASES

Bob Mulrooney  
Extension Plant Pathologist

CRABAPPLES are leafing out, especially after Wednesday's warm weather, and soon flowers will appear. Scab, caused by the fungus *Venturia*, is the most important disease of crabapples. Depending on the season, use fungicide sprays to protect crabapples from defoliation beginning when buds first push open and repeated at 10-14 day intervals through early June. Often that is too much spraying for most homeowners. A reasonable compromise that provides modest control, but prevents serious defoliation is an

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## *What's Hot!*

Now is the time to cut back ornamental grasses and other perennials to get rid of the dead tissue and provide space for this year's foliage to emerge. If you wait too long, you will have to cut back newly emerging plant tips--not much of a problem with grasses but more problematic with some perennials. Liriope can be mowed to remove winter damaged tissue.

Winter injury is cropping up on many evergreens. We've seen some really ugly cherry laurel specimens. In most cases, plants will shed damaged leaves and new growth will cover the injured leaves. Sometimes, the damage is so severe that selective pruning is warranted.

Cut back shrubs grown for their winter foliage now. Red twig dogwood can be cut back to the ground completely or you can remove two-thirds of the old canes back to the ground. Do not cut redbud dogwood back uniformly to 1-2 feet in height (as I have seen in a number of places). That will result in heavy branches at the base of the plant that won't exhibit good red coloration next winter. Only young stems color well and you want the coloration to extend all the way to the base of the plant.

*For more information*

on pests & practices covered in this

Helpful numbers to know:



Garden Line	831-8862
(for home gardeners only)	
New Castle County Extension	831-2506
Kent County Extension	730-4000
Sussex County Extension	856-7303

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## Diseases (Continued)

application of captan plus chlorothalonil (Daconil), Banner Maxx (Infuse for homeowners) or Eagle (Immunox for homeowners), at bloom then repeated 14 days later. Crabapple scab does not kill trees but can defoliate them prematurely if weather conditions favor infection throughout the season. Many landscape situations do not require heavy fungicide use and the use of resistant cultivars is always encouraged.

**EUONYMUS CROWN GALL.** While pruning back my *Euonymus fortunei* 'Emerald 'n Gold' to remove lots of old *Euonymus* scale, I found several old woody galls slightly smaller than a baseball on several old stems that had died plus several smaller green ones on green stems. These galls are caused by the bacterium *Agrobacterium tumifaciens* that causes crown gall, which can be important especially if the galls occur at the crown of the plant where they cause stem breakage and loss of entire plant sections. Prune to remove the galls and sanitize pruners between cuts with 10% bleach or rubbing alcohol. A fact sheet is available on the web at <http://ag.udel.edu/extension/information/pp/pp-41.htm>

**LEAFSPOT.** Mountain laurels (*Kalmia*) may have unsightly leafspot now. If leaf loss was excessive or the plants just look terrible, control of the disease on the new growth may be justified. Rake and compost or destroy old, infected leaves, if practical. Protect the new growth by spraying with Daconil 2787, myclobutanil (Eagle/Systhane, Immunox), mancozeb or other labeled fungicide when the new growth emerges and repeat according to the spray interval on the label during the wet spring weather.

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Editor: Susan Barton  
Extension Horticulturist

