

## Fall Pruning and Fertilizing

I have recently noticed many landscape plants starting to show signs that the growing season's end is just around the corner. Many trees (and other plants) are showing a small amount of fall color, dropping a few leaves and remaining leaves often have minor scorching and yellowing. This is especially common in Norway maple, honey locust, ash, poplars, aspens and most newly planted trees and shrubs. These conditions are normal and will not affect the health of plants. However, if a tree develops moderate to heavy leaf scorch in a relatively short period of time, the cause should be investigated.

Another item I have seen appearing lately is disease called powdery mildew. The disease is caused by a group of closely related fungi that are present on the leaf surface of many different plants. The disease appears as a white or light gray powder on the leaf surface. When it appears in late summer or early fall, it can cause leaf scorching but generally does not impact plant health long term. Powdery mildew is especially common on lilac late in the growing season. However, it is generally not necessary to treat this late in the year.

Unlike other plants that have recently developed powdery mildew, I have seen many Norway maples with an inordinate amount of powdery mildew this year; especially red leaved varieties like Crimson King and Crimson Sentry. To reduce the chances of infection, these trees should not be planted where there is a lack of air circulation and where it remains cooler or more humid than the rest of the landscape. These conditions are ideal for the spread of the disease. Other plants that are especially prone to powdery mildew throughout the growing season include squash and honeysuckle. For more information access the following webpage entitled powdery mildew of flowers:  
<http://utahpests.usu.edu/plantdiseases/htm/ornamental/powderyflowers/>

Over the last few weeks, I have additionally observed many people pruning trees and shrubs. Late summer into fall is the worst time of year to prune most woody plants. Moderate to extensive pruning often stimulates new growth that the plants do not have time to properly harden off to cold weather. When this occurs, severe plant damage is common. It is alright to prune an occasional branch but more extensive pruning should normally be saved until late winter or spring in most cases. Woody ornamental, spring flowering plants like spireas, flowering almond, lilacs and snowball bush should be pruned immediately after they bloom. Summer blooming species such as rose of Sharon, blue mist and butterfly bush should be pruned in late winter or early spring.

Fall fertilizer applications to woody plants are also not recommended. Like pruning, it can stimulate lots of green growth that may not be properly hardened off before cold weather. When woody plants need to be fertilized (they often do not) late winter or early spring an ideal time to do so, before plants form leaves. Keep in mind that over fertilizing can cause an excessive amount of green growth that is more susceptible to insect pest and diseases. This green growth is often less likely to produce flowers or fruit.