

MONTHLY TIPS

Yes Dorothy it's hot outside. This is the top season for the deadly and hard to see spider mite. These little mites - not true insects, actually they are arthropods and a relative of the spider. True insects have three body parts while mites have eight legs and only two body parts. **Since they are not true insects, many insecticides have little effect on them.**

Spider mites attack a plant by piercing leaf (or needles in the case of junipers) tissues and sucking the green liquid that oozes out. The leaf tissue then looks brown after it has lost its green color. Quickly killing the affected foliage. Heavily infested leaves and branches can become covered with an almost invisible webbing - another tell tale sign of their presence - look at you plants in early morning when the dew is still on.

A good way to determine these mites exist is to hold a piece of white paper under the branch, tap the branch sharply, if present, the mites will drop off and you will notice some of the spots on the paper moving. The most common mite to our area is the two-spotted spider mite. So called because under a magnifying glass, you will see two dark spots on either side of its abdomen. This type of mite feeds on more than 150 flowers, vegetables and woody ornamentals.

Spider mites have a very short life span but they reproduce quickly. When our temperatures reach into the 90's mite population can more than **double every three days**. A regular inspection of your trees is imperative now. Spider mites also thrive on plants under stress. This stress may come from under-watering, damaged foliage or root systems. One easy control is to continually wash the foliage down. **Mites cannot live in a wet environment.** Moisture will create a fungus disease, which kills them. So keeping a moisture balance can help. Now, do not over water the soil, just keep the foliage moist. By washing down your foliage every at least once a day, you will wash out mites and also the dreaded aphids and scale. During hot weather, I wash down my foliage every morning and again in late evening during my normal waterings.

As mentioned, don't confuse watering the foliage with watering the soil. Insecticidal soap is a good control agent. I generally use a product called "pyola" and so far this year, no mites. The "pyola" is a light highly refined canola oil, which encapsulates and smothers the insects and its eggs while not affecting many of the "good" insects, which may fly by.

Remember, if you see signs of mites, don't put off spraying or eliminating them till tomorrow or the weekend. By then the plant could be dead or at least suffered vastly from the pests and weakened them.

Juniper foliage

When it comes to junipers, there are two ways or reasons to pinch & lightly prune. We are aware that growth on a healthy juniper can be rampant but the majority of growth is only at the tips. Junipers rarely bud back unless we force or trick them into it. Actually in a regular plant (non bonsai) very few plants will bud back on their own. Most trees, shrubs or plants again, unless we trick them, will continue to grow outwards, stretching for the light. If you want a branch to increase thickness or to regain strength - maybe due to spring repotting. Do not pinch the foliage until mid summer - late June/July. This will of course help create strong and larger branches. Once the desired size is obtained and it is pinch / pruned (at the proper time) it generally will stimulate budding back of the remaining sub branches. If you want to maintain the foliage area or the silhouette, then you simply pinch off the new buds as they appear. This technique does not stimulate back branching and will in fact, slow down the tip growth. Although junipers are vigorous growers, continual pinching back will result in a weakening of the tree. For this reason, you should alternate your techniques. After a couple years the foliage areas become so thick you must thin them out. If not thinned out, the inner areas will die back due to lack of light. If for some reason a branch weakens don't pinch it, allow it to grow and gain strength. Another technique or should I say requirement is to remove dead needles as they appear. Junipers will typically "shed" foliage in June or July. Similar to pines shedding their 1, 2 or 3 year needles. This dead foliage also adds to shading, holding moisture (& potential disease) or deflecting the sun just as dense growth does. Plus, these dead needles are very distracting. So keep your foliage areas clean and the entire tree will benefit.

(Ed's. Note: The above has been freely "stolen" from "Bonsai by Design", the Newsletter of The Greater Evansville Bonsai Society, June 2005, Vol. 13 No. 6)