The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

By Dr. David L. Roberts, *The Plant Doctor LLC a.k.a. The Tree Doctor*

U can caL me on my ceL fone

INTRODUCTION

Prior to my recent retirement from Michigan State University, I had what some considered to be a popular and informative website called treedoctor.msu.edu. Regrettably, MSU took the site down upon my retirement, and people have been asking what happened to it; I plan to develop a new website, which will be known as **plantdoctorllc.com**.

Over the many years while my treedoctor.msu.edu website was active, I received numerous queries from people not just from Michigan but from many locations in North America . . . and occasionally from faraway places such as South America, Europe and the Middle East. Technology is a wonderful thing but sometimes it creates more work for us as my website did for me from the exposure it received. Hate them or love them, our cell phones have become "the office" for many of us . . . the center focus from whence we conduct our daily activities. I have received some very interesting contacts over the past several years. Please follow along as I share some of those experiences and memories.

MAMA'S FAVORITE OAKLEAF HYDRANGEA *(PHOTO 1A & 1B)*

An arborist texted me this photo asking, "What's wrong with this plant?", followed immediately by, "It's not herbicide." I studied the photo and texted back, "It's herbicide." After a phone discussion, I agreed to meet her at the Birmingham residence a couple weeks later. Upon arrival, we studied the situation extensively; I noticed that there was bare soil along the house adjacent to the hydrangea. However, Mama's husband (Papa) steadfastly denied ever having applied any herbicide. After another hour of discussion with repeated denials by Papa, Mama started speculating that the neighbors had done something; Mama was planning to call her attorney. Regardless, I related my certainty that Imazapyr herbicide was involved, and I had exhausted my efforts to find the source of the herbicide because of Papa's continued denials, the reason the arborist had concluded the problem was not herbicide. As the arborist and I were finally leaving, the husband went to the garage and produced two containers of herbicide (Photo 1B), but persistently denied ever having applied an herbicide in that area. Well . . . upon the revelation of the husband's possession of two containers of herbicide containing Imazapyr, Mama was not happy. Husband was probably not going to get any supper that evening. The moral of the story is, if you are reasonably certain about something, stick to your guns until you get the correct answer by various means at your disposal . . . trickery, skullduggery, torture, persistent interrogation, whatever.

Photo 1A

Photo 1B

IS CHYNA SUSCEPTIBLE TO TAR SPOT? *(PHOTO 2 & INSET)*

Trisha from Illinois sent me an email query wondering if Chyna, her beautiful Chinese Crested, could contract Tar Spot from her maple trees. Apparently Chyna developed some dark sport on her skin. I replied that plant pathogens generally do not infect humans or other mammalian relatives on Planet Earth. In fact, the tar spot fungus is rather specific to its host plants, Norway and Silver maples, and will not even attack the related Sugar Maple. Even though plants and microbes may cause allergic reactions to humans and "man's best friend", such as that possibly experienced by Chyna, these rashes should clear up with changing seasons. I recommended Chyna visit a vet for a more qualified opinion. Hope you get well, Chyna!

Photo 2

TAR SPOT QUERY #2, A DISAPPEARING ACT *(PHOTO 3)*

Katy sent the following message, *" . . . my maple trees are infected with black tar fungus. I have been raking and raking these leaves up. What I wanted to tell you is what I have found. The leaves themselves couldn't do this on their own, so it has to be the live fungus. The leaves literally bury themselves in the dirt, until the whole leaf is disintegrated. Stem and all. Then a little mound of dirt appears over the hole, so it's completely covered. When I pull the leaf out, the hole is quite*

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large. I'm sure this is one way they survive and return the next year."

I replied that some critter such as earthworms, moles or voles are most likely burying the maple leaves affected

by Tar Spot. The fungus and the leaves have no legs or other means of locomotion; they are passive and cannot bury themselves. However, Katy didn't accept my explanation until she did some further research and became a believer of my reply. Katy describes herself as a very inquisitive person and would love to go back to college; however, she is afraid that she'd be my oldest student. Impressed with Katy's tenacity, I told her that she was never too old to become a scientist! BTW (text lingo for "by the way"), the disappearance of tar-spotted maple leaves into the soil is an outstanding biological control measure for this disease.

FRAN'S "DYING OAK" *(PHOTO 4 AND INSET)*

Fran, who lives near Hartland, Michigan, became frantic when she received three different "professional" opinions regarding leaf drop from her oak tree: Oak Wilt (with a recommendation of immediate removal), Two-Lined Chestnut Borer, and anthracnose. Upon visiting the site, I found that her primary issue was Cynipid Wasp Gall (CWG), a rather innocuous infestation that should pose no long-term health

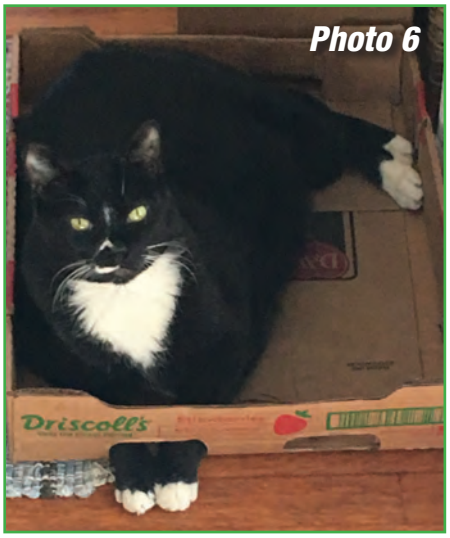
problem for her tree. Despite Fran's pleas for my recommendations to do something to save her oak, I persisted in advising her to do nothing because minor, nonlethal pests and diseases "wax and wane" from year to year. The following year, her oak tree was just fine.

RAINING CATS & GALLS IN CALIFORNIA *(PHOTO 5 & INSET, PHOTO 6)*

Todd from the central coast of California sent a variety of photos after seeing my article on Fran's CWG. He apparently encountered so much CWG raining down that he was having trouble cleaning up his landscape. Todd had apparently been drenching frequently with Imidacloprid insecticide to try to control the infestation.

I related that Imidacloprid does not typically affect wasps (Hymenoptera) and that the insecticide may even make his problem worse.

Tuxedo (Photo 6), my cat, always wanted his picture on the cover of the Rolling Stone. I told him The Landsculptor was far more prestigious. Having ballooned into a "ham" weighing over 30 lbs., "Tux" went



on the Keto diet and now appears pretty svelte in his formal wear.

IN NEED OF A BETTER PHOTOGRAPHER *(PHOTO 7)*

Many of the questions I receive by email or text are accompanied by photographs. Unfortunately, many of the photos are *not* of sufficient quality for me to be able to assist the inquirer. Such was the case with Baljinder, from Troy, MI., who had seen one of my Trellis Rust articles on the web. Bijan wondered if his ornamental pear had Trellis Rust.

TRELLIS RUST IN ROCHESTER HILLS? *(PHOTO 8)*

Gerry submitted this photo of a pear in Rochester Hills, wondering if it had Trellis Rust. Even though the photo is not particularly sharp, the pear appears to be afflicted with Trellis Rust. Rochester Hills is a hotbed of Trellis Rust.

ANONYMOUS *(PHOTO 9)*

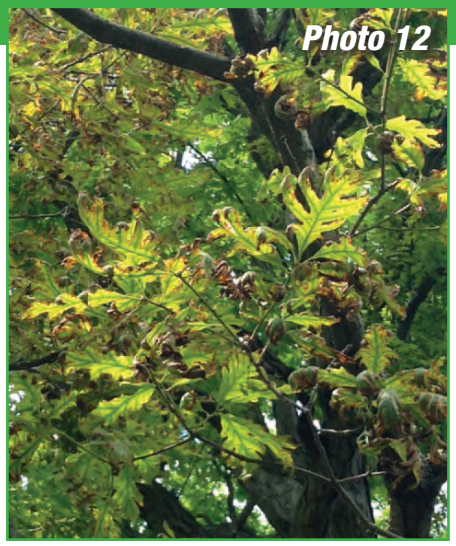
I have received many inquiries regarding "aliens" found in someone's landscape or woodland. "Shrooms" can be very challenging to identify. In addition, people often ask the weirdest questions. And, I'm concerned with what inquirers might try to do with them: eat them, smoke them or whatever?!?! This one happens to be rather easy to ID. It is a "stinkhorn", also known as devil's dipstick. This fungus belongs to a mycological class known as the Phallaceae, genus Phallus . . . and are stinky, slimy mushrooms designed to attract flies and other critters so their spores can be transported around the community. During the Victorian Age, the sudden appearance of these "Phalli" would elicit cries of alarm from chaste, honorable ladies of good breeding. And now you know, many scientists occasionally have a good time with our dry sense of humor (chuckle, chuckle, chuckle).

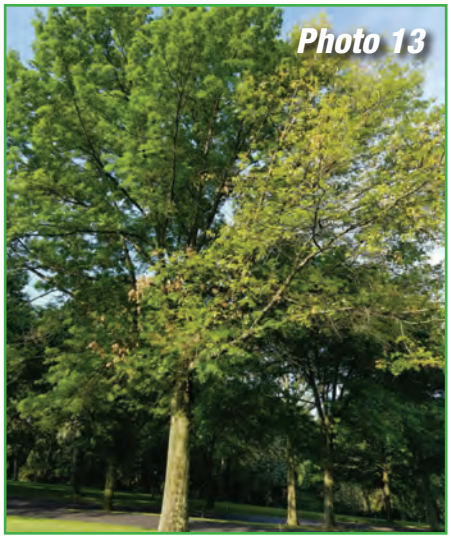
BLACK SPOT ON LIVE OAK FROM TEXAS? *(PHOTO 10)*

John from Texas wondered about the spots on the leaves on his Live Oak tree (Quercus virginiana). I suspected Tar Spot, caused by the fungus Trabutia quercina, but their tar spot in the south on live oak is unrelated to our common tar spot on maple . . . other than being fungal-incited. I suggested he contact someone in Texas who is more acquainted with Live Oak issues than I am.

OAK WILT IN GRAND RAPIDS, TOLEDO AND PITTSBURGH? *(PHOTOS 11, 12 & 13)*

Because of my work on Oak Wilt for more than 30 years, I receive a fair number of questions about the disease. Bill from Grand Rapids (Photo 11), Karl from Toledo (Photo 12) and Stanley from Pittsburg (Photo 13) wondered if their trees were affected by the deadly disease. While some photos are of good clarity and others are of poorer quality, I don't think I'd ever want to diagnose a case of Oak Wilt from a photo . . . unless it's a photo of a pressure pad (a sure sign of confirmation). Because of the economic gravity of Oak Wilt, I'd want to make absolutely certain of an accurate diagnosis through lab culture, and other tests and information. I told Karl that there is no evidence of Oak Wilt in his photo . . . but who knows for sure without further investigation?





CAN DISC (FRISBEE) GOLF CAUSE OAK WILT? *(PHOTO 14)*

Lisa is working with a Northern Michigan township to possibly establish a disc golf course, which are being developed in great numbers with this increasingly popular sport. She asked if injury to oak trees could result in Oak Wilt infections. Lisa, you betcha.

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BABY ASH IN MEDINA OHIO? *(PHOTO 15)*

Email from Sarah in Medina Ohio: "*Hi Dr. Roberts, I'm writing because I have a question about a young tree growing in my yard. It showed up a year or two ago and I didn't have the heart to tear it up. I first thought it was a hickory tree, since there are many hickories around here (NE Ohio) and the leaves looked like hickory. However, this year, I noticed the leaves have nine leaflets (as opposed to five like the hickory usually has) and the branches are growing opposite to each other. The leaves resemble the pictures of ash tree leaves on your website, so I'm thinking it is an ash tree. I'm aware of the plight of ash trees due to the emerald ash borer. This leaves me uncertain as what to do about this baby tree. Part of me wants to let it grow (and exercise preventative care for the EAB) since it's endangered, but another part of me wonders if I will just be creating further habitat for the EAB, in which case it would be best to pull it up. What would you recommend? Thanks, - Sarah*"

I confirmed the identification of Sarah's mystery tree as an ash and presented her with several options, including saving the tree if she desires.

Photo 15

Photo 16

DARRIN'S TREE ID IN CANADA *(PHOTO 16)*

Darrin, who lives in Howell, MI. was traveling through Canada and wondered what type of tree this was. Yep, it looks like a "pollarded" Catalpa.

Photo 17

EAB IN ALABAMA? *(PHOTO 17 & INSET)*

Colter from Alabama was uncertain of the identity of his tree. He thought it might be an ash. He was concerned about the excessive leaf drop. While I couldn't confirm the presence of the EAB, the leaf drop is likely due to anthracnose (Inset), a fungal disease.

COCONUT PALMS IN THE BAHAMAS *(PHOTO 18 & INSET)*

Gina, who lives in the Bahamas, sent some photos of her coconut palm trees. It seems that the community uses her palm as a billboard to nail garage sale signs and other poster announcements, creating all sorts of damage to the trunk of the tree (Inset). While I'm no coconut palm expert,

Photo 18

there are some general do's and don'ts in tree care that we can apply to all trees whether from the tropical or temperate regions. One of those advisories is to not injure trees unnecessarily. While I advised Gina on the care and recovery of her tree, I thought this situation might warrant a site visit. Don't you?

Photo 19

A JEEP IN PETOSKEY? *(PHOTO 19)*

Friends know I have a "couple" of Jeeps. Dave from Ohio texted the picture of this older, mint-condition Jeep he saw in Petoskey, MI. Unfortunately, he couldn't get near the owner who was being chased down the street by other admirers. Oh well . . . maybe next time.

BTW, my ceL fone # is two four eight three two zero seven one two four.

Dr. David Roberts has retired from Michigan State University but intends to remain active with the industry. He is CEO and CBW (Chief Bottle Washer) for The Plant Doctor, LLC. Contact information: 248/320-7124 and treedoctordave@gmail.com