



# The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

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## SMOOTH PATCH

### INTRODUCTION:

Smooth Patch is a condition of bark on trees that results in different colors and textures of bark than normal. Often, smooth patch results in a lighter colored and smoother textured bark that may be mistaken for deer rub or diseases. Smooth patch is caused by a variety of fungi in the genera, *Aleurodiscus*, *Dendrothele* and *Hyphoderma*. *Aleurodiscus oaksii* on white oak appears to be one of the most common forms of smooth patch in Michigan. American elm, American hornbeam, hop hornbeam, sugar maple, burr oak, other oaks, willow and birch may also be affected. The fungal causes of smooth patch are saprophytic, meaning that the fungi feed on only dead (nonliving) organic matter. Hence, smooth patch is not considered a disease, but is regarded as a superficial blemish on the bark of trees.

### SYMPTOMS OF SMOOTH PATCH:

Smooth patch is the result of colonization and decomposition of bark on trees. The fungi use bark as a substrate for its growth and reproduction. This colonization and decomposition causes sloughing of the bark leaving a smooth, perhaps slightly sunken, and lighter gray area that contrasts sharply with the normal rough or deeply fissured bark (Photos 1-3). Typically, small patches develop first; these often coalesce into larger areas. During damp, wet periods, basidiocarps (fungal reproductive structures) may be visible as flat, leather-like discs that appear cream to beige to light gray in color (Photo 4). The curling of the basidiocarp at its edges may suggest that this structure is often mistaken for lichens. The basidiocarp may be visible year round during wet conditions but usually becomes inconspicuous during dry weather. These basidiocarps produce spores that may be wind blown or carried by insects or animal life to other trees.

### SMOOTH PATCH MANAGEMENT:

Smooth patch is not considered to be of health concern to trees because the fungus does not invade living tissue. Therefore, no management procedures are warranted. There are however, diseases and pests that may cause symptoms that in superficial appearance are similar to smooth patch. If leaves and branches are dying and/or an entire tree is declining while concurrently showing symptoms of smooth patch, an accurate diagnosis of the problem needs to be performed. Very likely, the occurrence of smooth patch on trees with symptoms initiated by diseases, insects, cultural or environmental problems is purely coincidental. 📌

For more information, please feel free to email me at [robertsd@msu.edu](mailto:robertsd@msu.edu) or contact a professional plant health-care provider. The author, MSU or MGIA do not endorse any particular products. If using pesticides, be sure to read and follow label directions.



**Photo 1.** Typical symptoms of Smooth Patch on the trunk of a tree consists of slightly sunken, smooth areas that often appear lighter in color compared to the surrounding rough bark.



**Photo 2.** The demarcation between Smooth Patch and normal bark texture is readily visible on this oak tree.



**Photo 3.** This ornamental face on this tree delineates both normal bark and smooth patch (right of the ornament).



**Photo 4.** Basidiocarps of Smooth Patch are barely visible in this close-up photo. Basidiocarps appear as small lichen-like flecks and are much more visible during wet conditions.



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