U Usd 2 caL me on my ceL fone

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

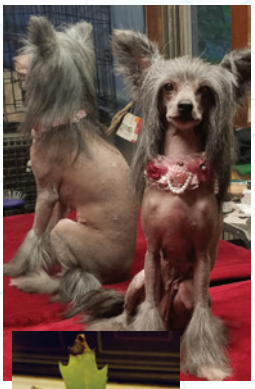
David L. Roberts, Ph.D is a Senior Academic Specialist at the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, with B.S. and M.S degrees in Plant Pathology from The Ohio State University and a PhD in Botany and Plant Pathology from Michigan State University. Dr. Roberts was the Director of MSU's Plant & Pest Diagnostic Clinic from 1984-1998. His current position is Senior Academic Specialist in the Deans Office at MSU's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources serving Michigan's Nursery and Landscape Industry.

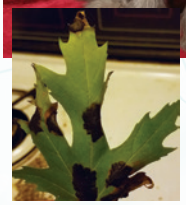
The lyrics from the catchy, popular song "Hotline Bling", sung by Drake, relate depressive memories about a lost love. But in some weird sort of way, the song also reminds me of advances in technology. Follow me if you will.

Starting out in high school and college with a manual typewriter, progressing to electric typewriters, then to computers, and eventually to electronic pads and smart phones, it's sometimes hard to comprehend the rapid changes in technology that have occurred over my career. These changes should have made life much easier. Who wants to go back to manual typewriters and correction ink? However, it seems we've become busier and busier. In the 1990s, Sandy Rosa and I started a website to more efficiently disseminate information that we thought might be important to the nursery and landscape industry as well as to the public. Over the years, the traffic to my website (treedoctor.msu.edu) has steadily increased, resulting in many inquiries for information on a daily basis. While answering these queries from all over Michigan and even around the world can be exhausting, they are also very intriguing. Following are a few examples.

Examples of Queries to the Treedoctor:

Can Chyna Contract Tar Spot?





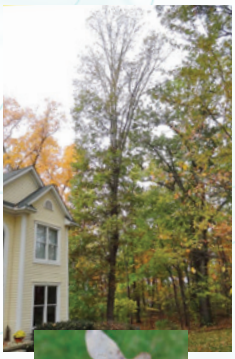
Trisha from Illinois wondered if Tar Spot on her maple trees could also cause the spots on her beautiful Chinese Crested named Chyna. In general the answer is "no". Plant pathogens usually do not attack humans or our "best friend". In fact, the tar spot fungus is rather limited to its specific hosts; it typically attacks silver and Norway maples, but not sugar maple. While various plants and microbes may cause allergies and rashes, such as that experienced by Chyna, these should clear up with changing seasons, etc. I suggested that Chyna visit a Vet for a more qualified opinion. Get well Chyna!

Tar Spot Episode 2, A Disappearing Act

From Katy, "…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. The hole, when I pull the leaf out, is quite large. I'm sure this is one way they survive and return the next year."

I replied that earthworms (or moles, voles) are most likely burying the tar-spotted leaves. The fungus and the leaves are passive and cannot bury themselves. However, Katy didn't buy my answer until she did some further investigations and became a believer. Katy, who describes herself as very inquisitive, would love to come back to college, but would be afraid that she'd be my oldest student. BTW, there is no better bio-control procedure than to have an earthworm destroy tar-spotted leaves. Katy, you're never too old to become a scientist!

Fran & Her "Dying Oak"



Fran from near Hartland, Michigan became frantic when she received three different diagnoses regarding her oak tree, which was losing leaves: Oak Wilt, Two-Lined Chestnut Borer, and anthracnose. Upon investigation, I was able to demonstrate that her issue was Cynipid Wasp Gall (CWG), a rather innocuous issue that would pose no long term health problems for her tree. Despite Fran's desire to *do something* to save her oak, I recommended doing nothing because minor pests and diseases "wax and wane" in cycles. Her tree recovered just fine the following year.

Cynipids Episode 2, Raining Galls

Todd from 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.

LBM ID

Photos of mushrooms are often submitted and are extremely difficult to identify. One of the most frequent questions is, "Are they edible?", followed by, "Will they kill my tree?". Because of the difficulty of ID and the dangers associated with consumption, I must be very careful with my advice. BTW, LBM stands for "little baby mushroom", a catch-all term frequently used when identification is impossible without a spore print or DNA technology.

Spruce Diagnoses and Company Bids

Homeowners such as Varsha sometimes put me in the unenviable position of reviewing diagnoses and work bids from companies. In this case, one company suggested Cytospora canker was the problem while another suggested Pitch Mass Borer; yet another company diagnosed something else, but all submitted bids to the homeowner for work to be done. I agreed with the PMB diagnosis and accompanying plan for work. While I perform mostly diagnoses, I generally don't become involved in assessing prices for treatments.

Herbicide Toxicity in Birmingham (MI), Massachusetts and the United Kingdom

An arborist submitted this photo asking for my opinion as to the cause of the weird growth of the Oakleaf hydrangea,… preempting my response by texting, "It's not herbicide." Apparently the arborist had already pursued the herbicide angle, and the homeowner denied any such application. I replied, "It's herbicide." We both visited the site a couple of weeks later and, finally, through torture, interrogation and threats elicited a confession from the husband about the use of Roundup 365 in the vicinity of his wife's favorite plant (he apparently didn't want her to know). Herbicide issues are becoming almost epidemic as homeowners have access to very dangerous materials. Associations in other states and the United Kingdom have requested permission to reprint my articles on herbicides, after finding them on my website.

Black Spot on Live Oak from Texas?

John from Texas wondered what was wrong with the leaves on his Live Oak tree (*Quercus virginiana*). It appears to be Tar Spot, caused by the fungus *Trabutia quercina*, but is unrelated to our common tar spot on maple…other than being fungal induced. I suggested he contact someone in Texas who is more acquainted with Live Oak issues than I am.

HWA from Norton Shores:

Kim, an arborist from western Michigan, submitted this fine photo of Hemlock Wooly Adelgid. As many know by now, the discovery of HWA in extended areas in western MI indicates that the invasive pest is here to stay. Although lethal to hemlocks, the pest is relatively simple to control in landscapes with Imidacloprid soil treatments.

Is this Beech Bark Disease (BBD)?

A rather frequent inquiry I receive from Michiganders concerns BBD. Many have heard of the disease, but are uncertain about how to diagnose it. Alan from the White Lake area submitted the top photo (BBD confirmed) while Susan submitted the bottom photo (not BBD, but Beech Woolly Aphid). One of the issues with BBD is to catch it early for more efficacious treatment. Advanced cases, which are regrettably the norm, are more difficult to manage.

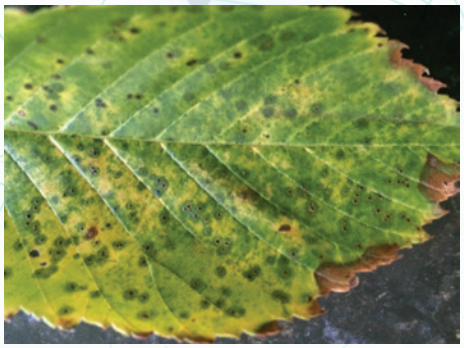
Trellis Rust from Rochester Hills?

Gerry from Rochester Hills submitted this photo of a pear, wondering if it is Trellis Rust. Even though the photo is not particularly sharp, the pears appear to have Trellis Rust.

Multi-Plant Leaf Scorch

Matt submitted several photos of a variety of plants with similar leaf scorch symptoms from a condo site. A subsequent site visit and soil tests revealed that deicing salt was likely to blame.

Dutch Elm Disease in SW Michigan?



Chris in Berrien County submitted this photo after being told by a landscaper that his 100-foot tall elm had Dutch Elm Disease (DED). This photo shows black spot, caused by *Stegophora*, but there is no evidence of DED….at least in the photo. This photo demonstrates why it's so important to obtain an accurate diagnosis before any treatments or tree removals are performed.

Oak Wilt in Grand Rapids?

Bill from Grand Rapids submitted this photo of an oak, wondering if it has Oak Wilt. I receive many photos without good clarity. Obviously, it would be difficult to diagnose Oak Wilt without a lab test or the presence of a fungal pressure pad, etc.

Oak Wilt in Toledo?

Karl was visiting his in-laws in Toledo and wondered if their white oak had oak wilt. There is no evidence of Oak Wilt from this photo.

Oak Wilt in Pittsburgh?

Stanley from Pittsburgh submitted this photo and wondered if it could be Oak Wilt. Again, while the photo is great and fairly clear, I wouldn't want to diagnose Oak Wilt without a lab test, a pressure pad or other important information.

Can Disc (Frisbee) Golf Cause Oak Wilt?

Lisa is working with a township in Northern Michigan to possibly establish a new disc golf course; she wondered if injury to oak trees could result in Oak Wilt infections. You betcha.

Pine Decline at a Community College

Donna, a landscape planner with a Community College in Michigan, sent this photo of trunk cross sections and wondered what may be affecting the pines on campus. This photo reveals the presence of *Ceratocystis* blue stain fungus, but discloses no evidence for the cause of death. Knowing the species of pine along with a thorough diagnosis is crucial to understanding potential causal factor(s).

Am I interested in this Jeep?

My friends/colleagues know that I have a "couple" of Jeeps. This classic, in excellent shape from the late 1980s, was observed in Harbor Springs, Michigan by my friend and colleague Dave. Unfortunately, he couldn't get near the owner who was being chased down the street by other interested parties without fear of being trampled in the stampede. Oh well…

GLTE

See David Roberts present *Michigan's Major Tree Maladies for 2017* at the GLTE on Monday, January 23rd.

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