



Question of the Week

Q: The leaves on my maple trees have black spots on them that look like tar. What is it and what should I do about it?

A: This sounds like “tar spot,” a disease caused by the fungus *Rhytisma acerinum*, which attacks many maple species. Symptoms first appear in late spring or early summer, when infected leaves develop light green or yellow-green spots. During mid- to late summer a mix of fungi and leaf tissue develops inside the yellowed area that resembles a spot of tar. Once in a while, leaves will shrink and drop.

The fungus overwinters on fallen leaves, and when the spring rains come, it infects the new leaves. To prevent an infection next spring, rake up all the fall leaves from beneath affected trees and remove them from the area.

Tar spot rarely harms the overall health of infected trees. Though it may cause premature defoliation, it doesn’t kill trees, so fungicides generally aren’t recommended.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu