



Question of the Week

Q: Why are the hemlock trees in my back yard turning yellow and dropping their needles?

A: According to UNH Cooperative Extension plant health specialist Dr. Cheryl Smith, hemlocks around the state are yellowing because of physiological stress caused by a combination of extremely wet weather in May and June, lots of new growth, interior shading brought on by the new growth, and feeder roots killed or damaged by waterlogged soils

The trees' feeder roots are particularly sensitive to flooded soils. When these roots are damaged, they can't to provide water to the top of the plant, often resulting in sudden or gradual damage to the trees. Symptoms of flooding stress often begin appearing after a period of hot, dry weather later in the summer.

The increased amount new growth may have shaded the interior branches. Initial symptoms of shading stress--needles turning yellow and dropping--appear in the center of the plant where light is most limited. Sometimes an entire branch dies back. The low-light conditions in the interior of the tree may cause a slow decline of these trees, especially established, somewhat overgrown hemlocks. Both the flooding and shading stress can predispose the trees to attack by pathogens and insects. One year of stress, however, rarely results in the death of established hemlocks.

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