



## Question of the Week

**Q: I have a row of spruce trees, and many of the branches have begun losing their needles and dying. What's wrong with my trees? How can I stop it from spreading to my other trees?**

**A:** If trees are Colorado blue spruce and inner needles on lower branches are dying first, while the outer, new growth is green, the problem is most likely a fungal disease called *Rhizosphaera* needle cast. To diagnose *Rhizosphaera*, collect some needles from beneath the tree and examine them with a magnifying glass or hand lens. If you see tiny black fruiting bodies (fungal reproductive structures) protruding in rows from the needles, the trees are probably infected with *Rhizosphaera*. The disease occurs on other species of spruce, but is most common on older Colorado blue spruce.

Remember that while *Rhizosphaera* may be common and aesthetically displeasing, the disease doesn't necessarily harm or cause long-term, severe injury to spruces if you take a few preventive measures. Cultural controls include increasing airflow by pruning lower infected branches and increasing tree vigor by watering, fertilizing and mulching properly. You can also use a fungicide such as chlorothalonil or Daconil 2787 as a preventive measure. Make a first application at bud-break, the second a week later, and a third three weeks later. For most trees, especially large ones, contact a professional tree care company to apply fungicide.

Be sure to diagnose the disease properly and do not mistake them for other problems, such as winter injury.

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](mailto:answers@unh.edu)