

White Pine Needles Turning Brown

Jun 13, 2016

Already detected in southern regions of New Hampshire

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Many people in the southern half of New Hampshire have noticed white pine needles turning yellow and brown this spring. While it is common for pine needles to turn brown and fall off during autumn months, the browning in spring is from fungi that infects the needles and produces what is known as “needlecast.”

White pine trees in New England have struggled with needlecast since 2010, and researchers are studying the four fungi known to cause needle browning. Researchers noted this year’s brown needles are a result of last year’s wet weather. When there is heavy rain during the growing season (May to July), the interior needles of white pine trees are infected with fungal spores as they develop new shoots.

“In a few weeks the brown needles will shed and what’s left will be green current year needles, which are the most productive and important set of needles on the tree anyway,” says Kyle Lombard, forest health specialist with the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands. “If the pine is otherwise healthy, it has the ability to survive this needlecast event.”

Cheryl Smith, plant health specialist with UNH Cooperative Extension, echoes the positive outlook for the white pine, but says people may see more dead lower branches than usual or further weakening of trees that are already unhealthy from other stresses. “Repeated defoliation can weaken trees, making them more susceptible to other pests and diseases,” she notes. “I have noticed trees that are hit each year are in decline.” Although damage is so far only visible in southern New Hampshire, if past years are any indication, the North Country will also be impacted by white pine needle damage.

Call the UNH Cooperative Extension Education Center info line at 877-398-4769 for information about keeping your trees healthy.

