

## Leaf Scorch

As the summer draws to an end, people's interest in their landscape sometimes lessens. One sure sign of this loss of interest is leaf scorch. Leaf scorch is essentially the browning of leaves due to water loss.

Symptoms of leaf scorch include browning of the leaf margins and yellowing or darkening of tissues between the main leaf veins. As the condition progresses, entire leaves may dry up, turn brown, and become brittle. Leaves sometimes wilt rapidly, usually remaining a pale green even when dried out. Plants may lose many leaves prematurely during late summer and exhibit some twig dieback.

Some causes of leaf scorch are soil compaction, transplant shock, nutrient deficiency, and herbicide injury. But the most common cause is inadequate water. The loss of leaves is seldom immediately fatal, but conditions causing leaf scorch should be corrected. Plants under the stress of leaf scorch are subject to secondary problems, such as attack by insects or diseases.

To prevent leaf scorch, maintain a tree's vigor by proper watering and fertilizing. When watering, deep water the entire area under a tree at least one and one half times beyond the reach of the branches. Check the moisture level at least twelve inches down; if it is somewhat dry, then water slowly, allowing water to penetrate to a depth of at least two feet. If soil is compacted, it may need to be loosened by mechanical means, either an aerating machine or a probe of some sort. Holes can then be filled with organic mulch. Sufficient moisture will help keep trees vigorous enough to withstand pest attacks, as well as help prevent winter injury.

Trees should receive deep waterings at least twice a year; once in the fall after leaves drop, but before the ground freezes, and again in the spring, as soon as the ground thaws. Keep in mind that this process may need to be repeated in the summer, during hot dry stretches.

Avoid fertilizing unnecessarily, unless the tree is showing signs of nutrient deficiencies, such as chlorosis, stunted growth, or deformed foliage. And when using herbicides near trees, do not allow mist to settle onto trees, and avoid spraying foliage or trunks with the solution.

As with other tree problems, it is easier to prevent the problem than it is to remedy the problem once it occurs. But if you find your tree has browning leaves, it doesn't always spell the end.

*~~Brett Hewatt is the Pocatello City Forester and a member of the Tree Commission.*