Cytospora Canker of Spruce

FACT SHEET

GREEN DROP Tree Care





What it is:

This disease affects white, Colorado (blue), as well as other spruce and is causes by the fungus Cytospora kunzei. It is becoming increasingly common in the urban forest, as it usually targets more mature trees 15 –20 years and older, and 3 meters or greater in height. Trees that are suffering from stress are most vulnerable to the disease. This stress can come in forms such as drought, pest and insect infestations (i.e. spider mites), soil compaction, lack of available root zone for further growth, and other environmental factors.

Symptoms:

The earliest and most visible signs of the fungus are the dying of a lower branch, signified by discoloration and then needle browning. The needles may remain on the branch or may fall off. As the disease progresses over the years, it spreads to higher branches. If left unchecked, the tree can eventually die from the canker. The cankers themselves are not initially visible, as there is no major bark damage or color change. Resin (sap) flow is quite often a sign of the disease and the white or grey dried patches of resin are very noticeable. This is not a guaranteed method of diagnosis however, as resin flow can be present at any injury that damages the bark. The presence of the Cytospora canker can be confirmed by a Green Drop certified arborist.

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Control:

The first step in the control of Cytospora canker is sanitation – the removal of the infected branches. Once a branch is infected, there is no treatment available to save it. It must be pruned off, preferably at the main stem. The diseased branch should then be destroyed as the spores can still be released from the canker and spread to healthy trees.

When the disease is not caught early enough it can be widespread throughout the tree, In this case, pruning may seriously disfigure the tree to a point where it may have no benefit to the landscape. As an alternative to removal, selective pruning, or management of the fungus should be considered with the goal of managing the disease over time, knowing that entire eradication of the fungus is not possible.

Prevention:

There are several steps that can be taken to help prevent the fungus from reinfecting the tree:

- Encourage higher levels of health and vigor. Fertilization of the tree and removing the causes of the stresses that are weakening the tree will help achieve this. This may involve pest control for budworm, scale, mites, etc.
- Establishment of organic mulch (wood chips, bark etc.) around the tree, as far out from the main stem as possible. Besides increasing nutrient levels and moisture, this will help to prevent mechanical injury to the tree (i.e. lawnmower damage).

Contact:

GREEN DROP Tree Care

Canada's Tree Expert

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