



Pest Corner

December, 2008

What about a literary “Gardening Holiday Stocking”. Here, in this last article for 2008, are inspired “pearls of wisdom” that may help us transition from winter to next year’s spring season. Most of these knowledge bites are adapted from seasonal articles published by our Grays Harbor County Extension Agent, Don Tapio.

Lichens

These structures consist of a fungus and an algae association. The crusty and colorful formations grow on trees, rocks, and shrubs during the cool and wet winter weather. Lichens thrive under extreme environmental conditions. Like algae, lichens manufacture their own food. They take varied shapes, often looking as crusty gray, green, yellow and white growths. Some are leaf-like; others resemble a tuft of horse hair hanging from the branches.

If control is desired, prune infested trees and shrubs to allow better air circulation and light penetration. A dormant spray of lime sulfur applied in January will control lichens on deciduous plants when used according to labeled directions. **Do not apply lime sulfur on evergreen plants such as rhododendrons and conifers as it will damage the leaves.**

Norfolk Island Pine (a popular Christmas gift in a pot) Is Losing Its Needles

It’s not unusual for a few, on the lowest branches, to turn brown and drop. If this happens slowly over time, it may be due to normal aging. Also address watering and temperature needs. Do not plant outside, as it is tender for our winters. Maintain indoors in temperatures of 60-70 degrees F (a bit cooler at night). It needs a couple of hours of daily direct sunlight. Rotate the plant weekly so it grows straight. Norfolk Island pines thrive at 50 % relative humidity. This is a challenge as indoor humidity often drops to 15% during the winter heating season. Water the potted plant when the top inch of the soil feels dry. Use enough water to allow a little excess to escape through the bottom drainage holes. When the plant is actively growing, feed it with a fertilizer suitable for indoor plants. Norfolk Island pine often enters a period of rest during the winter months, at which time it does not need fertilizer.

Holly Does Not Have Berries

It might be a male holly; or it could be a female too far from a male to be pollinated. The plant could also be too young. Usually a holly plant blooms when it is from five to ten years old. One male holly is usually sufficient to supply the pollen for 15 to 18 female

plants. To obtain a good set of berries, the male plants should not be more than 900 feet from the females. The pollen is carried from the male flower to the female flower by flies, honeybees and other types of flying insects. If you do not have a male holly, place a few small branches from a male holly in a pail of water near the female plant. The cuttings should be placed in the sunlight so there is more of a chance of attracting insects. **Both male and female flowers should be in full bloom** when this is done. Male flower buds will continue to open after the branches have been cut!

Plant Collapse from Wet Soils

Avoid planting sensitive plants in landscape areas prone to annual flooding, or where the soil is poorly drained. Research the cultural needs of the plants you have in the garden and observe them through the seasons. There's no question that excess water can be a serious problem for many woody ornamentals. Roots in flooded or water-logged soils are damaged and die from oxygen deficiency. **Flooding is also associated with fungal root rot diseases from *Phytophthora* and *Pythium* spp.** However, some landscape plants, like red osier dogwood, mugho pines, and crabapples thrive with wet soil conditions. Astilbe, Daylilies, Hosta, and Monkshood are just a few of a long list of herbaceous garden plants that will tolerate wet soils.

Gardening and Holiday Shopping

WSU publications make great holiday presents to yourself or others. You may dial the WSU publications office at: **1-800-723-1763** and ask for a copy of the Educational Materials catalog for 2008. For those who prefer to shop online visit: <http://pubs.wsu.edu>

Retail sales tax and shipping costs are added when orders are placed.