



## **Pest Corner**

May, 2005

During May, frequent inquiries concern conifers that look “snow-flocked” and about control of aphids in many plants.

### **Conifers infested with Cooley Spruce Gall Adelgids**

These aphid-like insects appear on Douglas Firs as cottony white masses. Signs are evident at about the same time as bud break. These insects feed on tree needles by sucking out plant sap causing yellowing and bending of needles or, in severe cases, early needle loss. This adelgid is a common pest on several kinds of spruce including Sitka, Englemann, and Colorado blue spruce. The alternative host of this pest is Douglas fir. Feeding by this adelgid induces spruce trees to produce a cone-like gall from 1 to 2 inches long and  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in diameter on the new branch growth (resemble miniature pineapples). Young galls are green or purple; older ones are reddish brown. The gall has cells, each containing many adelgids. In late July or August, the galls mature, open, and winged adelgids emerge. Winged females fly to Douglas fir or spruce and lay eggs on the needles. The eggs hatch and the immature females that develop from them overwinter. During the summer, spruce adelgids may remain on Douglas fir or fly back to spruce. There is one generation each year.

Only the tips of spruce branches are damaged. In Douglas fir, some tip destruction may occur but no gall forms. The pest does not usually kill Spruce trees; but, repeated infestation may weaken them and decrease their aesthetic value. Certain varieties of Douglas-fir seem to be resistant or tolerant. Some of the green-colored Douglas-firs are more resistant. Home gardeners can reduce future damage from the Cooley Spruce Gall Adelgid by pruning off galls on spruce trees and destroying them before they open in the summer, and before they turn brown. Once the galls have formed, spraying will not help. Chemical treatment include spraying with an Insecticidal soap, or with Dursban according to labeled directions (be aware of toxicity to bees) when new growth is expanding in the spring.

### **Sap-sucking Pests, Sooty Mold, and Insecticidal Soaps**

Evergreens such as camellias, laurel, rhododendrons, and conifers may show black sooty mold during cloudy weather of early spring. The molds (fungi) grow on the honeydew excretions of sap-sucking insects (aphids, scale insects, pear psylla, white

fly, mealybugs, etc.) Sooty molds do not attack plants directly, but they can destroy the beauty of the plant; and if extremely heavy, may shade out some light causing the plant to be less vigorous. Sooty mold may appear on walls, sidewalks, fences, vehicles, or wherever honeydew falls. Management and control: Sooty and sap-sucking insects are dislodged by washing plants with strong streams of water from a hose. The mold will gradually disappear once insects are gone. Use pesticides (Orthene), or insecticidal soap from February through July, depending on insect population. Read and follow labeled directions carefully. Once established, sooty mold is not easily removed. Insecticidal soap must contact pests directly to kill them. It is effective only while still wet; there is no residual activity after it dries. It usually does not kill insect eggs, so repeat sprays often are necessary to control newly hatched pests. Soap can damage certain plants. Follow label directions and do not use it on water-stressed plants or if the weather is very hot. Homemade recipes for insecticidal soap made from liquid dishwashing detergent are risky to use because of different concentrations of active ingredient. If spray is too concentrated, it may harm plants. It is best to use a commercial product that has been tested on a variety of plants.

### **IPM Practices Include Attracting Beneficial Predators**

The larvae and adult forms of the Ladybird beetle feed on aphids, mealybugs, scale insects, and spider mites. Other beneficials are green lacewings, hover flies, and parasitic wasps. These do a good job of aphid control if not killed with insecticides. Also, look for ants around infested plants. Ants and aphids form a symbiotic relationship where ants protect aphids from predators in exchange for the sweet honeydew.