Master Gardener Foundation
Grays Harbor & Pacific Counties, Washington

Pest Corner

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The information below was adapted from articles by Don Tapio, GHC Extension Agent.

Cytisus scoparius (Scotch Broom)

An invasive grower planted once as an ornamental, now invades large areas west of the Cascades from British Columbia to California.

In spring bloom, it is visible along roadways and neighboring lands and thus blamed as the allergen for hay fever. Scotch
Broom is insect pollinated. Being heavy and sticky, the pollen is not airborne. Its potential as an allergenic is minimal except perhaps when one handles a plant in bloom. Most hay fevertype allergies result from windborne pollens, such as grass pollens, abundant at the same time of the year.

Scotch Broom spreads slowly, but persistently. Mature pods split and eject the seeds. It seems that ants collect and disperse the seed; some birds may spread undigested seed.

According to Nancy Ness, Director of the Grays Harbor County Noxious Weed Control Board, each County Weed Board has the option to target weeds to be controlled. Public education is most important, as Scotch Broom may become a fire hazard.

Non-chemical controls include browsing by domestic goats; removing of the plants crown; repeated cultivation; mowing to ground level right after blooming.

WSU weed scientists recommend the use of triclopyr and glyphosate. Garden stores sell these two herbicides. Use and apply strictly per and according labeled instructions.

Spruce Aphids (aka WinterAphid)

The damage caused is mostly noticeable in June. Susceptible trees include Sitka spruce (Picea sitchensis), Norway spruce (Picea abies), blue spruce (Picea pungens) and other ornamental and commercial spruces. Rarely on pines (Pinus spp.) and/or Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii). WSU entomologist, Art Antonelli has identified some resistant spruce species: Serbian spruce (Picea omorika), Oriental spruce (P. orientalis), and Japanese/Tigertail spruce (P. polita), which grow well in the PNW.

Spruce aphids are mostly wingless, 1 to 1.5 mm long, olive green to very dark and pearshaped. The head can be yellowish green with reddish eyes. Mouthparts are the piercing/sucking type, pointed and downward, as with all aphids. Legs are long and slender. Nymphs are lighter green. Eggs are yellow to reddish to dark brown or black, about 0.6 mm long and can be very difficult to see.

Populations may increase in October through March with peak numbers in late winter and early spring. It may vanish during summer. There are several generations annually. The spruce aphid came from Europe and only females exist in the PNW. They reproduce by means of parthenogenesis (no males used), which results in a clone of the female. Female aphids cannot evolve without genetic exchange from males. Aphids feed on older needles and do not move to the new growth immediately. During feeding, needles may discolor yellow or brown, die, and drop.

Detection: Examine the lower end of branches and toward the trunk, but infestations can occur everywhere. Use a stiff piece of card stock and a hand lens. Brush two branches together over the card stock and look at the residue. Infestations begin in the bottom branches and move upwards. If you see five or more per sample and already see needle damage, spray down the areas with a high-pressured stream of water to knock them off. You may want to hose branches each week starting in late January/early February. However, if you see little, fast, brownish alligator-like creatures, they are lacewing larvae and will gobble up the aphids, so delay spraying.

Controls: Plant resistant varieties, when possible. Spruce aphid avoids many a natural enemy. There are few aphid feeders active in the winter. Late season ladybugs and early-season brown lacewings might have some impact. Temperature and weather may regulate spruce aphids. Prolonged temperatures below 15F can be deadly for aphids.

Chemical control can be successful in managing the spruce aphid when populations are abundant. Highly refined horticultural spray is the least toxic and most environmentally sound treatment for controlling spruce aphids. Read the label carefully.

Pest Corner is the title of a series of gardening articles which appears in the Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties Master Gardener Newsletter.