

Urban Forestry Branch

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Forest Health Care
Tar Spot of Maple

Tar spot is a fungal leaf disease that may occur on several plants, but it is most common on maple. The disease is caused by a fungus *Rhytisma acerinum*. The tar-like spot is a fruiting structure of the fungus. It survives the winter on fallen leaves. In the spring the spores of the fungus, blown by the wind, infect newly developed leaves. Tar spot, although unsightly, rarely threatens the health of the tree.



Tar spot on Norway maple in late summer



Tar spot on Norway maple in fall

Host and Damage

Tar spot is most common on Silver and Norway maples. It also may affect Sugar, Red and Sycamore maples.

The first symptoms of infection show up in early summer as small yellow spots on leaves. The spots become larger and darker and by late August they look like spots of tar. Tar spot does not cause serious damage to established trees. The disease may cause premature leaf drop, but it does not cause permanent damage to the tree.

Specific Management Practices for Control of the Tar spot of Maples:

- Rake and remove infected leaves in the fall to help destroy the overwintering fungus. Leaves may be composted by city composting programs.

General Management Practices To Improve Plant Health

- Water your trees during dry spells. Infrequent, but deep soaking preferably during the early morning hours is recommended. Water absorbing roots are located within the first 25 cm of the surface and extend outward further than the height of the tree.
- Place organic mulch, (e.g. wood chips), or living mulch, (e.g. ground covers) around the tree base to keep the soil moist for longer periods and encourage healthier roots.
- Avoid any unnecessary excavating, grade changes, soil compaction, root cutting or hard resurfacing around trees as these activities destroy vital roots which may lead to tree decline or death.
- Refrain from using high levels of salt or herbicides around trees.

Forest Health Care is a holistic approach to tree care that focuses on improving the health of trees in an urban environment. Our objective is a healthy, sustainable urban forest. Trees in urban forests are often stressed by compacted soil, drought, poor planting and pruning techniques, air pollution, road salt, damage from construction and much more. Trees planted in the right sites and properly maintained are less likely to suffer and are more resistant to pest problems.

Pest problems are managed using a decision making process, that considers the following:

- Identification of the host and the pest.
- Monitoring of the host and the pest.
- Selection of the appropriate management strategy.
- Evaluation of the management plan.

Our focus is on pest management programs that are environmentally, socially and economically sound.