



Predicting problems in nature is interesting...always lots of variables that don't regularly act in any expected fashion. So why bother? Well – for one thing, I find it fun to monitor environmental conditions and review plant material performances (weird, I know). But, more importantly, it may offer a head's up look at potential problems. That gives us a chance to correct potential issues – where possible - with cultural and manual measures rather than with chemical products. Planning is a good thing. It allows time to make good decisions and use the best method(s) or product(s) for each issue in a timely manner. So what's up for 2008? There will be plenty of insects to deal with - especially the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), which will not be going away any time soon. Anticipate the need to understand the potential issues and responsibilities that surround it. As always, fungal and bacterial infections may occur on almost anything green and growing. Weeds will grow in the turf and in the flower beds. And plants will be stressed from weather related conditions. Am I psychic? Not by a long shot - let's talk about a few of these.

EAB – with some incoming problems, the hype can overplay the reality of the situation. In this case, we should be so lucky. According to federal and state inspectors, they haven't yet confirmed a beetle in the State of Wisconsin. The expectation is that they will be found and that we will have to deal infestations somewhere in our area - the when and where are the unknown factors. Are there chemical treatments to prevent beetle damage? Yes. Are they effective? Sometimes. Should they be used now? No, it's the wrong time of the year. Time to elaborate a bit. Federal and state organizations have developed response plans that detail what measures will be taken to contain and eradicate any infestation zone. At this point in time, those plans call for elimination, not chemical treatment. If homeowners choose to treat ash trees and are unlucky enough to have an EAB found nearby – those trees will be handled in the same manner as those that have not been treated. The choice is up to the individual as to how they want to handle the decision to treat or not. I advise checking out the latest research on EAB to help make that decision.

There are many insect critters that plague us regularly. Fortunately, the cicadas will not be back in full force for another 17 years. But - Japanese beetles will be back, as will box elder bugs, Asian lady beetles, earwigs, slugs, leafminers, chinch bugs, and June bugs, and, and, and...

Under some circumstances, control is necessary. Under most other circumstances – there really is not much to worry about except cosmetic damage. Proper identification and a bit of education on critter life cycle will help to focus efforts at the most effective, and deadly, growth periods.

Every year fungal and bacterial pathogens will hit the plants. This year will be no different. Fortunately, healthy plants are less susceptible to extreme disease ramifications. And a few cultural practices can help you out. First, when purchasing plants, consider all site and growing conditions - a properly placed plant will be healthier. After installation, considerate care practices include making sure that landscape plants receive adequate water. The equivalent of 1" rain per week is generally enough for established plant material, and about 2" per week for anything that is newly planted. As plants grow, they need to be pruned and trained to grow strong. Take the time to understand when a plant flowers and produces fruit and whether the plant responds best to infrequent, severe, or light pruning techniques. As a general rule, and for most plants, structural pruning should be done during the dormant season. If a flowering plant, pruning just after flowering to ensure that blooms are not lost. If growing plant material for fruit, learn and understand the best methods to structurally train and prune to encourage strong branching and the best production.

Weeds seem a part of life in the landscape. We can't escape them - they demand our frequent and personal attention. From a cultural perspective, weeds can teach us about soil quality, nutrient deficiencies, compaction, and moisture levels. Observing, identifying, and learning about conditions under which they prosper will point out needed corrections in the landscape. If more intense control is needed, there are growth regulator products that can help in the control of weed germination and growth prior to emergence. Timing is crucial to success. Carefully read and follow the label instructions for handling, application, rates, and timing. Each product formulation can differ. Use good judgment and caution when choosing and applying any chemical.

Lastly - but this year, certainly not the least of the issues facing the landscape - are environmental factors. Over the past few years, we could certainly count on a lack of consistent moisture and extreme conditions. Extended droughty periods, excessive rains, abnormally hot winds,

cold summer nights, early dormancy, and a warm, moist fall – all have contributed to the increased stress levels exhibited by some of the big and little landscape materials. The long-term stress factors and an early January thaw will work to force premature bud break – so don't be surprised to see a few green leaves pop out here and there. And with any early emergence, expect to see some leaf damage anywhere from the middle of spring through early summer. Should we be worried? Maybe a bit of concern would be more appropriate. Anytime plant material is stressed for a few years in a row, it is especially important to monitor your plantings a bit more closely and maintain good cultural and health practices.