



While the recent moisture has thrown our gardening schedules into the wind - there are some definite positives to the rains. Come on, admit it. We really did need some rain. Remember, it has been quite dry for the past few years resulting in a substantial ground water system deficit. Last fall was dry and even our winter did not bring consistent snow levels. These rains will help to begin that long term process of water level rejuvenation. In the short term, insect populations can be affected by the weather conditions - and this year that may be a big bonus for us in dealing with some of those pesky critters, and a detriment in dealing with others. Disease severity - which is affected by species susceptibility, the weather conditions, and available inoculum - may see an increase early this season.

What are we looking at in terms of some of the insects for this year? In the case of the gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) - the rainy weather can lead to a decrease in the populations. In past years, when the rains have hit at the time of emergence and early movement, the young have been washed out their feeding areas frequently enough to reduce their survival rate. And in this fungi friendly weather, there is the potential for an increase in those that attack and kill the gypsy moth. But - and this is important - keep watchful as the season progresses. Nature has a way of thumbing its nose at us when we are not paying attention. Early detection and treatment will go a long way in the battle for successful control. Identifying Gypsy moths is not especially difficult as they are distinctive in appearance - the young larvae are gray to brownish tan in color, with hairy tufted spots of blue and red along the back. Be careful when handling as that hair can result in skin irritation. As they tend to do the heaviest feeding at night, you may only see the excrement, or frass, under trees (they love our beautiful oaks) of heavy infestation.

Sawfly populations may also see a decrease this year due to the rains. For those with European Pine Sawfly (*Neodiprion sertifer*) susceptible plant material, red and mugho pines especially, this is good news. Although the rains may sufficiently wash the larvae down this spring, check your susceptible plant material and treat if populations are present. To identify sawfly larvae, look for wormlike critters dark to grayish green in color with dark stripes running down the back. When disturbed on plant material, the individuals will rear up as a group, moving in unison - kind of cool in an odd way. Sawflies love to feed on old needles which, generally, do not re-grow after defoliation. This can make for some rather odd looking - or artsy, if you are an optimist - plant material. Although

sawflies are easy to control with most mild insecticides, or a well-placed spray with the hose, often infestations are not noticed until a lot of damage has occurred.

Bloodsuckers - ticks and mosquitoes - are having a good year. Ticks have been a huge problem already this year. Populations are high and as they love tall grass cover, they are puppy happy. Be sure to check yourself, kids and pets when coming in from outside. If you catch them early, it's not quite so gross to pull them out. If you are concerned about Lyme disease, the latest research says that it takes about 48 hours of tick attachment to transmit the disease. That's another good reason to check often for ticks. Mosquitoes - well, we've been lucky the past couple of years. That won't be the case this year, at least during the early part of the season. Dawn and dusk are the prime times for mosquito activity so either avoid outside activity during those periods or apply a good slathering of repellent to get safely through the mass of biters. There are some home consumer insecticides out there that will provide an okay level of perimeter yard control, but do be aware that effectiveness is limited by the weather conditions (moisture and wind), foot traffic, grass height, and the conditions in the surrounding yards. If you choose to use any type of chemical product for control, follow the label to the letter regarding application and safety, apply rates as recommended, and carefully adhere to the re-entry periods before allowing anyone into a treated area.

The weather conditions have been lovely for the development of many fungal problems. Look for lots of scab on apples of all types, and many species leaf spots on just about everything else. The severity of the problems and treatments available are dependent on many factors. So if you are seeing intense problems, call in an expert to help you out. In some cases, there is nothing that can be done at this point in the season, and at this point in the disease cycle. The current and historical significance of any diagnosed problems will help you to decide whether the plant material needs some additional health or cultural care boosts to thrive for the remainder of this season and into the next. Given the growing conditions over the past few years, there will be some plant material in serious need of some tender loving care this year.