

# Down the Garden Path

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## In This Issue...

### THE GRAPE VINE

- Yellow Bees are Everywhere!

### HOME

- The Field Cricket — Annoying or a Musical Genius?

### OVER THE BACK FENCE

- Collecting Wasp Nests
- Pine Needles Dropping
- Pruning a Blue Spruce

### YARD

- Raking Leaves
- Water Me Now or Replace Me Later

### PUZZLE MANIA



## THE GRAPE VINE

### Yellow Bees are Everywhere!

*Tim Gibb, Insect Diagnostician*

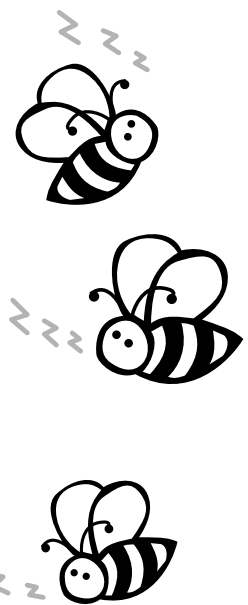
The 'yellow bees' swarming around trash cans and garbage receptacles are yellow jackets, a kind of wasp. Yellow jackets are social insects, living in colonies often containing several thousand wasps. Like many social insects, yellow jackets can sting and do so very aggressively when their nest is threatened. Stings are always very painful and can be an extremely serious health threat if multiple stings occur or if the victim happens to be hyper-allergic to the venom. It is always best to avoid wasp nests if possible. When wasps are away from their nest, they are not nearly as aggressive. They must be provoked to sting. Usually stings in these situations occur when a wasp is handled or accidentally stepped on or crushed by some unsuspecting person.

Each year in Indiana, we receive reports of people being stung in the mouth or the throat area when they inadvertently swallow a yellow jacket which has entered their soft drink can or has hidden itself in food about to be consumed.

What can be done about these pests? It is important to understand that the reason that yellow jackets seem to be 'everywhere' at this time of year is that their colony is at its maximum size during late summer and early fall. They forage for sweets and proteins. They often occur near our garbage cans, at picnics, or outdoor sporting events. Yellow jackets are masters at finding food, anywhere that it is exposed. This behavior is also the key for pest control.

If we take away their food or make it inaccessible to them, they will fly somewhere else to feed. Simply keeping foods, including garbage cans, covered and away from people as much as possible will help prevent yellow jacket stings. Increased attention to sanitation will also help. Cleaning garbage receptacles on a regular basis and keeping doors and windows closed will help prevent yellow jacket encounters. If a yellow jacket nest, either underground or hanging from an eave or a tree, is found in an area where people are likely to contact it, authorities who are trained to deal with yellow jacket nests should be alerted.

Away from where people might accidentally contact the nest, yellow jackets are beneficial insects. They feed on other insect pests and also help to remove garbage from the environment. For this reason, nests away from public areas should be left alone. ☺



## HOME

### The Field Cricket — Annoying or a Musical Genius?

Corey Gerber, Insect Diagnostician

Field crickets are black to reddish brown in color and have very long antennae on a broad head. They measure, when mature, 5/8 to one inch in length.

In Indiana, field crickets generally have 1 generation a year. Females will lay eggs singly in the soil profile. As soon as the young crickets emerge, they will begin feeding on seeds, seedlings, and other plant material. To reach maturity, crickets must go through a growth process in which they molt or shed their cuticle ("skin"). Once mature, the males will sing and dance to impress females during courtship. After mating, females lay eggs in the soil. The eggs overwinter in the soil and begin a new generation the following spring or summer.

At this time of year, field crickets will enter homes in search for warmth. Although field crickets are vegetarians, they can cause damage to some fabrics such as linens and furs. To prevent the crickets from entering inside the home, make sure that all doors and windows are properly screened and that cracks along the home are sealed.

Satisfactory control of crickets frequently involves chemical treatment inside and outside (a perimeter treatment) the building structure, as well as the removal of breeding and feeding sites outdoors. Only if large numbers of crickets are present, sprays of carbaryl and malathion are recommended. As with all chemicals, read and follow label directions. ☺

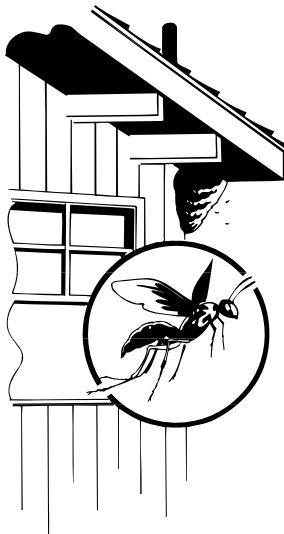
## OVER THE BACK FENCE

**Q:** There is a wasp nest under the eave of my barn. I want to take it down and give it to my child's class. Would it be okay to take it down after a killing frost or would I have to spray it with a wasp killer to kill the wasps that are living in it? What happens to the wasps during the winter? Do they leave the nest? Where do they overwinter?

**A:** I would not remove the nests until a few frosts have occurred to be sure the wasps are all gone. The other problem with taking a nest down too early (in addition to waking angry wasps) is that sometimes the brood or the immature wasps and food provisions have not all been removed from the nest. If this is not done, it begins to rot and stink inside the classroom.

Only the queen wasp overwinters. She will leave the nest and hide under leaf litter or bark somewhere. The rest of the wasps live until the food supply is exhausted and then they will vacate the nest to die. It is not always the frost that kills them because they are somewhat protected in their nest from frost. Frost or more particularly late fall, does trigger their decline and exit from the nest however. That is why taking the nest right after the first frost is risky.

--Tim Gibb ☺



**Q:** Help! I have just noticed that the older needles on all of my pine trees, as well as my neighbor's pines, are turning yellow and dropping off the tree. This year's needles are still green. What is wrong? Does this mean my tree is dying?

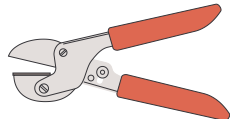
**A:** No need to fear! The symptoms that you are observing are normal for this time of year. Pines and arborvitae normally shed their oldest needles in the fall. White pines usually retain their needles for two to three years. The older needles, those towards the center of the tree, turn yellow before dropping. Older arborvitae leaves turn a reddish brown.

Natural needle discoloration may be more noticeable on trees that have experienced root stress due to less than optimal growing conditions. Extended dry periods during the summer months, poorly drained sites, and heavy clay soils may accentuate root stress to pines. Since the newest growth (this year's needles) is still green and healthy in appearance, you can be assured that this yellowing phenomenon is a natural one.

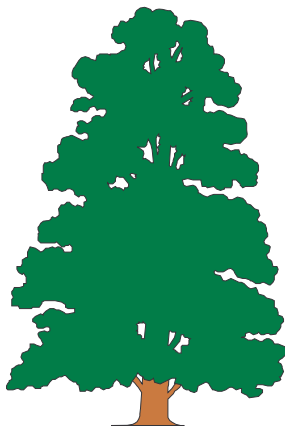
For more information on improving the growing conditions of your trees refer to *HO-140, Fertilizing Woody Plants*, available from your local county Cooperative Extension Service office. In addition, deep-core aeration may help improve root growth by improving the soil structure and the percolation of water into the soil. To apply one inch of water a week (the minimum needed during drought periods) you may need to run a hose and sprinkler or soaker at full capacity for 1.5 hours under the branch spread (drip line area). --Gail Ruhl ☺

**Q:** Can a Colorado blue spruce tree be pruned to control its size? if so, what time of year should it be done and what is the proper pruning method, tool, etc.?

**A:** Pine, spruce, and fir trees generally require less maintenance pruning than other evergreens. These trees produce all of their yearly growth in one spurt. Pruning is generally limited to removing dead or damaged branches close to their point of attachment or just above a healthy branch. To encourage more compact growth of these trees, the tips of new shoots, called candles, can be cut back halfway before the needles unfold. Candling usually occurs between late April and mid May, depending on the weather. The candles are quite “soft” and should be easily cut with hand pruners.



Cutting the shoot tips after the needles have developed will result in a misshapen plant, as these trees cannot replace the growing tips. Pine, spruce, and fir trees should be planted where they will have ample space to grow to preserve their natural beauty. --B. Rosie Lerner ☺



## YARD

### Raking Leaves

*Zac Reicher, Turfgrass Management Specialist*

Do not let a heavy layer of leaves build up on your lawn before winter. Heavy layers of tree leaves will shade grass plants and can smother and kill grass plants yet this fall. In addition, leaf cover favors a very damaging winter turf disease called snow mold. Rake heavy layers of tree leaves and either compost them or put them on your garden. Remember that leaves will compost quicker if they are chopped or mowed into small pieces. Also chop or mow the leaves into small pieces before you put them on the garden, do not apply more than a three inch layer of leaves, and be sure to till the leaves into the soil. Small sized leaves or light layers of leaves can usually be taken care of with a couple of late-season mowings but thicker layers may need more mowings to mulch them into the turf. If the layer gets too thick, you may be better off raking the lawn. ☺



### Water Me Now or Replace Me Later

*Bruno Moser, Horticulture Specialist*

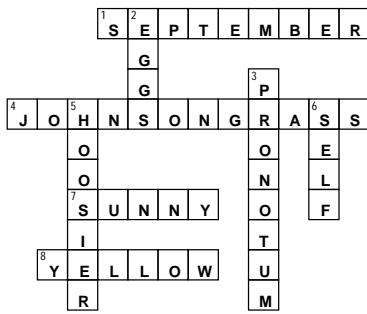
Fall is an important time to remember that landscape plants continue to need soil moisture even though they are not actively growing. Many areas of Indiana have experienced dry weather in recent weeks and lack of water can indeed compromise the ability of plants to survive over winter. This is especially true for newly transplanted additions to the landscape as their limited root system is unable to forage extensively for soil moisture.

Even though deciduous plants lose their leaves, they continue to lose moisture through their stem surfaces during the fall and winter months. Evergreens are especially prone to desiccation throughout the winter when the soil is too dry.

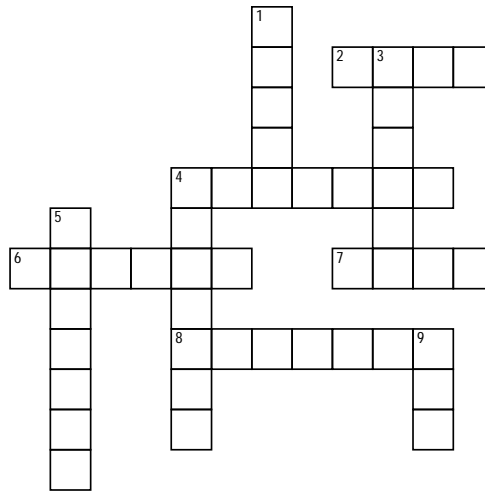
Now is the time to begin a regular watering program to prepare your shrubs, evergreens, and ground covers for the harsh and desiccating conditions of Indiana's winter months. A good rule of thumb is to provide plants with one inch of water every seven to ten days between now and when the soil freezes for winter. Mother nature will provide some of this in the form of rain, but often not in sufficient amounts. You need to supplement this with sprinkler irrigation, soaker hoses, or simply hand watering from the end of your garden hose. Remember, plants under overhangs are entirely dependent on you for soil moisture.

Attention to this often forgotten detail of good gardening practices will ensure winter survival of valuable landscape plants and their vigorous new growth next spring. ☺

The answer to the puzzle from the last issue (No. 104) is shown below.



## PUZZLE MANIA



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**Dan Childs**, Weed Science  
**Corey Gerber**, Entomology  
**Timothy Gibb**, Entomology  
**B. Rosie Lerner**, Horticulture  
**Karen Rane**, Plant Pathology  
**Zac Reicher**, Turfgrass Agronomy  
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### Across

- 2 Yellow jackets are masters at finding this.
- 4 The tips of new shoots of spruce are called \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 Crickets enter homes in search of this.
- 7 Deciduous plants continue to loose moisture through these surfaces during the winter.
- 8 You can do this to raked leaves.

### Down

- 1 Only this wasp overwinters.
- 3 Pines normally shed these needles in the fall.
- 5 Yellow jackets remove this from the environment.
- 9 Provide woody plants with one inch of water every seven to \_\_\_\_\_ days from now until the soil freezes.



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