

Down the Garden Path

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GARDEN

Harvesting and Preserving Gourds

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In This Issue...

GARDEN

- Harvesting and Preserving Gourds

THE GRAPE VINE

- Tar Spot of Maple

OVER THE BACK FENCE

- Spring-flowering Trees and Shrubs Blooming Now?
- Pyracantha Scab

YARD

- Stay Off Frosted Turf!

HOME

- Pest Proofing Your Home

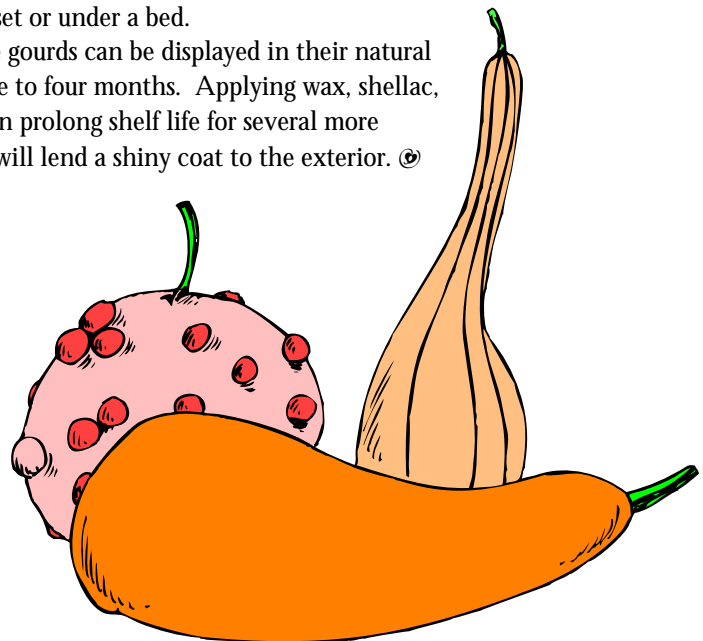
While gourds are often a part of today's Halloween and Thanksgiving decorations, they date back to 2200 B.C., making them among the oldest cultivated plants in history. Since the times of the Egyptian tombs, their shells have been used as dippers or containers for grain storage; other types are edible when young and tender.

The term "gourd" is most correctly applied to the hard-shelled members of the vine crops known as cucurbits and includes plants of several species. Today gourds can still be used as functional tools such as birdhouses, dippers, lanterns, and storage bins. Many gourds are used to add a harvest look to autumn decorations.

Although each gourd may have its own characteristics, in general, gourds are ready to harvest when the rinds are firm and the stem of the plant begins to turn brown and dry. Gourds should be harvested when they are fully mature, but before frost.

Gourds should be "cured" or air-dried prior to use. First wash them with warm soapy water and then place on layers of newspaper to dry for about a week. During the time, the outer skin hardens and surface color sets. Replace the newspaper with fresh sheets and allow the gourds to dry for an additional three to four weeks to finish drying. To encourage drying and good color retention, dry gourds in a warm, dry, dark area such as a closet or under a bed.

Decorative gourds can be displayed in their natural state for three to four months. Applying wax, shellac, or varnish can prolong shelf life for several more months and will lend a shiny coat to the exterior. ☺



THE GRAPE VINE

Tar Spot of Maple

Peggy Sellers, Director, Plant and Pest Diagnostic Laboratory

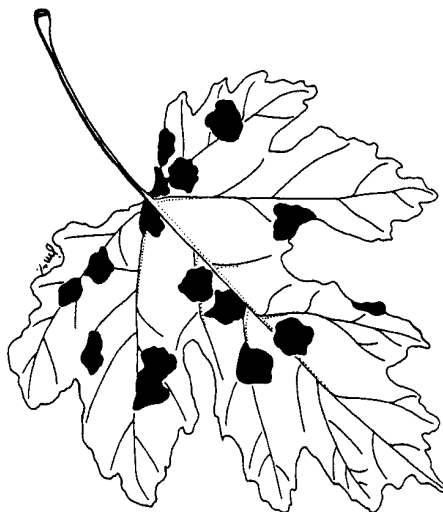
Have you noticed black tar-like spots on the leaves of your maple trees? If so, your trees likely have a fungal disease known as tar spot. Tar spot is most common on red and silver maple, but can also occur on bigleaf, Norway, sugar, and sycamore maple. Although the disease is very showy, it is not very damaging.

Tar spots on maples are caused by fungi in the genus *Rhytisma*. Two of the most common species are *R. acerinum* causing spots that are about 1/2 inch in diameter, and *R. punctatum* causing spots that are much smaller (about 1mm in diameter). Spots caused by *R. punctatum* are sometimes called speckled tar spots.

Symptoms first appear in late spring or early summer as infected leaves develop light green or yellow-green spots. During mid to late summer, black tar-like raised structures are formed on the upper surface of leaves within the yellow spots. By fall, the stromata caused by *R. acerinum* may appear ridged or wrinkled. The tar-like structures are actually fungal structures that contain fruiting bodies in which spores are developed.

In the spring spores mature and are released from the fruiting bodies within the infected, fallen leaves. These spores may then infect newly emerging leaves, repeating the disease cycle. Symptoms typically appear one to two months after infection.

Tar spot diseases seldom are detrimental to the overall health of infected trees. Tar spots may cause premature defoliation, but are not known to kill trees. However, several successive years of early leaf loss may cause stress to the tree, causing it to be susceptible to other problems. Tar spot is best managed by raking and destroying fallen leaves to prevent overwintering of the fungus. ☺



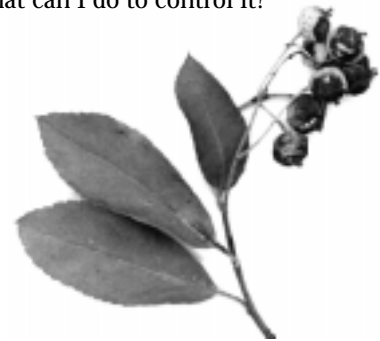
Tar spot caused by *Rhytisma acerinum*.

OVER THE BACK FENCE

Q: I am seeing flowering crabapples, flowering quince, and forsythia in bloom now. What is causing this phenomenon?

A: It is not as unusual as you might think. All of the spring flowering trees and shrubs produce their flower buds in fall. They just need the right number of hours of chilling in order to be ready to break bud. Some plants have a relatively small chilling requirement. I'm guessing that a brief cold spell followed by a warm spell triggered some of those buds into breaking. Not a big deal, might mean fewer blooms in spring, but nothing serious. --B. Rosie Lerner ☺

Q: The fruits on my pyracantha are black and ugly. What is causing this and what can I do to control it?



A: It sounds like you are describing a fungal disease known as scab. Pyracantha (firethorn) scab is a fungal disease that causes the normally orange-red fruit to be covered with black scabby lesions. Symptoms on leaves appear as dark sooty nondiscrete spots.

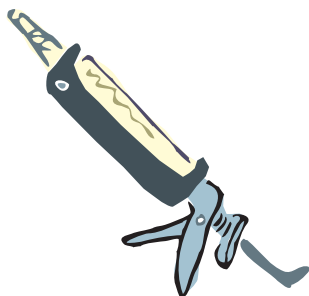
Management of this disease focuses on the use of resistant varieties and fungicides. A general purpose fungicide such as daconil can be used before and after flowering. As with any pesticide, read and follow label directions before using. --Peggy Sellers ☺

YARD

Stay Off Frosted Turf!

Zac Reicher, Turfgrass Extension Specialist

The threat of frost is now in the forecast, but it doesn't have to get down to 32 degrees to frost and often frost occurs in low areas even though the official temperature is reported to be 38 degrees or higher. If it does get cold enough to frost, be sure to stay off frosted turf until the sun melts the frost. Newspaper carriers and early morning golfers and joggers can do a lot of cosmetic damage on frosted turf. The damage appears as a blackening of the leaves which gradually turns to a brown or tan. A number of theories exist about how frost damages living tissue, but the most common belief is that ice crystals damage and kill plant cells when they are forced into the leaf by the weight of a foot or wheel. Spring frost damage will normally recover after two to four mowings. However, damage that occurs during the fall when grass growth is slowing, may be still visible next spring. ☺



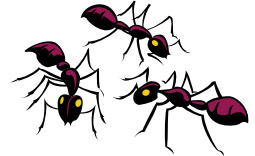
Caulking gun

HOME

Pest Proofing Your Home

Mike Potter, Kentucky Pest News: September 14, 1998

One of the best ways to limit unwanted intrusions by insects, rodents, birds, squirrels and other pests is to deny them entry, a procedure known as pest proofing. Many pests seek refuge in homes and buildings in response to changes in weather, such as extended periods of rain or drought, or the onset of cooler autumn temperatures. Taking steps to block their entry before they end up inside can greatly reduce the chances of future sightings.



Outlined below are six useful tips for pest proofing one's home or place of business. Equipment and materials mentioned can be purchased at most home improvement or hardware stores.

1. Install door sweeps or thresholds at the base of all exterior entry doors. While laying on the floor, check for light filtering under doors. Gaps of 1/16 inch or less will permit entry of insects and spiders; 1/4 inch-wide gaps (the diameter of a pencil) are large enough for entry of mice. Pay particular attention to the bottom corners as this is often where rodents and insects enter.

Apply caulk (see #3 below) along bottom outside edge and sides of door thresholds to exclude ants and other small insects. Garage doors should be fitted with a bottom seal constructed of rubber (vinyl seals poorly in cold weather). Gaps under sliding glass doors can be sealed by lining the bottom track with foam weather-stripping.

2. Seal utility openings where pipes and wires enter the foundation and siding, e.g., around outdoor faucets, receptacles, gas meters, clothes dryer vents, and telephone/cable TV wires. These are common entry points for such pests as rodents, ants, spiders and yellow jackets. Holes can be plugged with caulk, cement, urethane expandable foam, steel wool, copper mesh, or other suitable sealant.

3. Caulk cracks around windows, doors, fascia boards, etc. Use a good quality silicone or acrylic latex caulk. Although somewhat less flexible than pure silicone, latex-type caulks clean up easily with water and can be painted. Caulks that dry clear are often easier to use than pigmented caulks since they don't show mistakes.

Buy a good caulking gun. Features to look for include a back-off trigger to halt the flow of caulk when desired, a built-in "slicer" for cutting the tip off of new caulking tubes, and a nail for puncturing the seal within. (Hardware stores sell guns with these features for less than \$10.00.) Prior to sealing, cracks should be cleaned and any peeling caulk removed to aid adhesion. For a professional look, smooth the bead of caulk after application with a damp rag or a moistened finger.

4. Repair gaps and tears in window and door screens. Doing so will help reduce entry of flies, gnats, mosquitoes and midges during summer, and cluster flies, lady beetles, and other overwintering pests in autumn. Certain insects, in particular leafhoppers and hackberry psyllids, are small enough to fit



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through standard mesh window screen. The only way to deny entry of these tiny insects is to keep windows closed during periods of adult emergence.

5. Install 1/4-inch wire mesh (hardware cloth) over attic, roof, and crawl space vents in order to prevent entry of birds, bats, squirrels, rodents, and other wildlife. Be sure to wear gloves when cutting and installing hardware cloth, as the wire edges are razor sharp. Invest in a chimney cap to exclude birds, squirrels, raccoons and other nuisance wildlife.

6. Consider applying an exterior (barrier) insecticide treatment. While sealing is the more permanent way to exclude pests originating from outdoors, comprehensive pest-proofing is labor-intensive and sometimes impractical. For clients requiring an alternative, pest proofing can be supplemented by an exterior treatment with an insecticide. Homeowners will get the most for their efforts by applying longer-lasting liquid formulations containing synthetic pyrethroids (e.g., Spectracide Bug Stop , Ortho Home Defense System) or microencapsulated, slow-release Dursban, sold at hardware/lawn and garden shops. Read and following label directions before using any pesticide.

Apply with a pump up sprayer, hose end sprayer, etc., treating at the base of all exterior doors, garage and crawl space entrances, around foundation vents and utility openings, and up underneath siding. It may also be useful to treat around the outside perimeter of the foundation in a two to six-foot-wide band along the ground, and two-three feet up the foundation wall.

Clients who choose not to tackle these activities may wish to hire a professional pest control firm. Many firms are beginning to offer pest proofing as an adjunct to other services. When all else fails, a vacuum cleaner or broom is often the best response to the occasional bug that wanders in from outdoors. ☺

