TALES FROM THE CLINIC

LICHENS

I have had several questions this week about lichens. Lichens are unique organisms that are the result of a symbiotic relationship between a fungus and an alga or bacteria. These two organisms together are able to live in very inhospitable environments including the sides of trees, rock faces, fence posts or bare ground. Lichens can vary dramatically in appearance from green, mossy masses to flat, leafy gray plaques.

Homeowners often wonder if lichens are harmful or damaging their plants. Lichens frequently appear on plants that are growing poorly or declining in the health giving the appearance that they are sucking energy from the plant. However, the reality is quite different. Lichens require light to grow. A healthy plant usually has a thick leaf canopy that shades the branches and prevents lots of lichens from growing. When a plant is stressed, the canopy tends to thin out allowing more light to penetrate and giving lichens a chance to colonize the branches. Lichens only use the tree for physical support – they do not damage or harm it in anyway – but they are a symptom of the tree’s declining health.

There is no need to treat or try to kill lichen growing on a tree, however you should investigate why your tree is growing poorly. Common causes of poor tree growth include environmental stress, poor management or being situated in the wrong location. Improving the growing environment for the tree will help improve its vigor. Appropriate fertilizing and irrigation schedules should help. However, if the tree is growing in an unsuitable location – consider transplanting it to a better location or replacing it with another plant that is better adapted. If your tree is very heavily infested, prune lightly to remove branches with the heaviest lichen load and stimulate new growth within the tree that may help shade the lichen out.

A few lichens here or there are normal and nothing to be worried about but if you see a lot of lichens on your tree, evaluate the plant’s health and consider what steps you can take to improve it.
MOLES – NO EASY ANSWER
Charlotte Glen, Horticulture Agent – Pender County Cooperative Extension

Forget the ground hog, there’s one sure sign spring is on the way popping up in yards all over eastern North Carolina – mole tunnels. Though moles tunnel actively all year, the tunnels they make in spring and fall are usually more obvious because they are closer to the soil surface. Unfortunately there is no easy, fast solution to rid a yard of moles. Instead, effective mole control relies on patience, persistence, and a little knowledge about their habits and behaviors.

The Ways of Moles
Moles spend the vast majority of their lives underground seeking food, with earthworms, snails, slugs, grubs and other insects making up the majority of their diet. The natural life span of an eastern mole is around three years, and during this time they will often eat up to 100% of their body weight in worms and insects each day as they churn through the earth at speeds of up to 18 feet per hour. While raised, dome-shaped tunnels are the most frequent sign of mole activity, moles will also occasionally dig out living chambers deeper in the earth, pushing excess soil out above ground. This results in mounds of loose soil that are commonly known as mole hills.

Moles generally lead solitary lives and are believed to be fairly territorial. Adult moles reproduce once a year, with females giving birth to between two to five babies in spring. These young moles strike out on their own when they reach five to six weeks old. Though homeowners often think they have multiple moles living in their yards, this is often not the case. Extensive damage can be caused by one mole, which may create up to 150 feet of new tunnel each day.

Mole Control Options
There are a plethora of home remedies touted for mole control – unfortunately none of them work. Many commercially available products, such as sonic vibration devices and castor bean repellents, have not been scientifically shown to have any effect either. In reality mole control is very difficult and even if you get rid of the mole living in your yard right now there is nothing stopping a new one from moving in. The problem is the conditions where grass grows best, where the soil is well drained, loose, and reasonably fertile, are also the conditions preferred by moles.

Reducing the amount of insects in the soil by broadcasting pesticides throughout your lawn is sometimes touted as a way to reduce mole damage but this is rarely effective and not recommended. Most soil applied pesticides target specific insects, such as white grubs or mole crickets. Moles, on the other hand, eat a wide array of insects with earthworms being one of their favorite foods. Most lawn insecticides do not kill earthworms, which is a good thing because earthworms are highly beneficial to lawns and gardens. In some cases treating your lawn with pesticides can even increase mole activity in the short term because moles will have to tunnel further to find enough insects to eat.

The most effective mole control method is trapping, but successfully trapping moles takes time and patience. Two types of traps are available, live traps and kill traps. To use either successfully you must first find out which tunnels your mole is actively using by mashing them down each day and checking the next day to see which ones have popped back up. Traps should be set in the tunnels that are popped back up and checked daily. Both have their drawbacks – kill traps can be difficult to use and dangerous, while with live traps you must do something with the captured animal. In addition, since moles are a native mammal with no declared hunting season in North Carolina, to legally trap moles (live or dead) a person must get a trapping permit from the NC Wildlife Commission. These permits are available anywhere hunting and fishing licenses are sold.

Another option is to hire a wildlife damage control agent to come and trap the mole for you. Lists of wildlife damage control agents by area are available on the NC Wildlife Resources Commission website, www.ncwildlife.org under the nuisance wildlife link.

Find out more about moles and voles from these great resources:

Wildlife Damage Mgmt Factsheet - lots of details! jpwdm.org/handbook/mammals/Moles.asp
Mole Factsheet from NCSU TurfFiles www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/Other_Pests/Moles.aspx

Think you may have voles? Voles eat bulbs, plant roots, and tree bark just under the soil line, whereas moles only eat insects, Voles sometimes travel in mole runs. Check here to find out more: www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/wild/wildlife/wdc/voles2.html
DOWN ON THE FARM
(Things to Do and Foods to Eat in Onslow County)

Each month, I would like to spotlight a local farm that you can visit to learn about agriculture or buy locally grown products. This month’s farm encourages you to do both.

Whispering Dove Ranch and Apiary is a working farm that produces a variety of products using sustainable agricultural techniques and is located just minutes from Jacksonville. Whispering Dove Ranch produces humanely raised meat, eggs, honey and more. The owners, Dale and Linda Klose, welcome tour groups and visitors by appointment. Visitors learn about agriculture, sustainable livestock production and beekeeping. They also have the opportunity to pet and interact with many of the animals on the farm including goats, rabbits and chickens.

Whispering Dove Ranch is home to sheep (including several heritage breeds), Boer goats, chickens, rabbits, guinea hens and pot-bellied pigs. The sheep and goats are raised outdoors on carefully managed pastures without the use of antibiotics. They are also certified Animal Welfare Approved – this third party certification ensures that the animals are raised humanely from birth to slaughter. The chickens are truly free-range (they will meet you at the door of your car) and lay their eggs in nest boxes, the hayloft or wherever they please. The guineas provide insect and tick control while the pot-bellied pigs are mostly pets. Lamb, chevon (goat meat), rabbit and free-range eggs are available year round.

The farm also has its own beehives and honey house. In the honey house, the honeycomb is processed to produce honey and beeswax. Tour groups are treated to an education in the production and processing of honey. Afterwards, visitors can purchase Certified Naturally Grown raw honey on site but the farm also offers an entire line of handmade goat’s milk soaps, health and beauty products, and beeswax products.

Linda and Dale Klose sell direct from the farm and at the Onslow County Farmer’s Market (which opens April 9). They also welcome tours and visitors by appointment.

For additional information, please call 910.455.7123 or visit them online at www.ncagr.com/wdbgr.htm.

Don’t know what to do with lamb or chevon? Check out the recipes below:

Chevon or Lamb Stroganoff

Chevon or lamb, with its sweet, rich flavor, does a stand-in for beef in our version of this classic comfort food. Substitute any of the optional ingredients and it will still turn out great! You can also cook this in the crock-pot after sautéing the veggies and meat.

Makes 4+ servings

Ingredients
- 6 tbsp. butter (or olive oil)
- 2 medium leeks, white part only, chopped (or use 1 onion)
- 3 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 1 1/2 cups white button, shiitake, (or cremini mushrooms, quartered)
- 1 1/2 tbsp. unbleached, all-purpose flour (or 1/2 can Cream of Mushroom soup)
- 1 1/2 cups beef or vegetable broth
- 3 tbsp. tomato paste (or V-8 juice)
- 1/2 cup sour cream, low fat or regular
- 2 1/2 lb. chevon leg steak or lamb, cut into 2 1/4” strips (or use kabobs, stew meat)
- 1 1/2 lb. wide noodles or your choice of noodles, cooked

Directions
Melt 2 tbsp. of the butter (or olive oil) in a large sauté pan and sauté leeks or onions until soft and tender. Add garlic and mushrooms and sauté until mushrooms release their juices and are softened. Remove from heat and set aside.

Melt 2 tbsp. of the butter (or olive oil) in a medium saucepan then add the flour (or cream of mushroom soup), the broth and tomato paste (or V-8) and continue to whisk until mixture is hot and thickened. Remove from heat and set aside.

Melt remaining butter (or olive oil) in a large skillet and quickly sauté the chevon or lamb meat. Combine all ingredients. Cook until meat is tender and the mixture is thickened. Stir in the sour cream last and continue to cook just until heated through. Spoon atop hot, cooked noodles and enjoy.
IN THE GARDEN NOW

Now is the time to start planting your cool season crops. Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, kale, lettuce, onion, garden peas, Irish potatoes, radishes, and spinach can all be planted this month.

If you haven’t already fertilized your trees and shrubs, do so before the middle of the month. Hopefully, you’ve already taken and submitted your soil sample so you can fertilize based on the results and recommendations!

Hold off on fertilizing your grass until May.

Take your soil samples now for areas that you want to plant this fall.

LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF

I’d like to take a minute and introduce myself. I am the new Consumer Horticulture agent here in Onslow County. Although my family has roots in eastern North Carolina, I just moved here from the mountains of western NC. I’m excited to be here, especially since its warm, the growing season is longer and I hear that you usually don’t get much snow!

I was born and raised on working family farms in western New York and then West Virginia. We raised pick your own strawberries, dairy goats and beef cattle. After high school, I went on to receive my Bachelor’s degree in Agriculture in Horticulture and Environmental Protection from West Virginia University.

After graduation, I moved to western NC where I ran a greenhouse growing native rhododendron and azalea from seed before transitioning to teaching horticulture at a community college. While I am new to working in Extension, I come from an Extension family – my father and aunt have both worked in Extension. I love to teach and I’m excited to share research-based information within our community.

Sincerely,
Lisa

EVENTS AND REMINDERS

March 1 (Tuesday) – Farmers Market Association Meeting, 2 pm.

March 8 (Tuesday) – Onslow County Beekeepers Association meeting, 7 pm.

March 10 (Thursday) – Master Gardener Association Meeting, 9 am.

March 21 (Monday) - The Plant Clinic will open for the season. Hours are 9-noon and 1-4, Monday through Friday. Bring your plant questions to the clinic and our Master Gardeners will help you find the answers. The Plant Clinic is located in the Onslow County Extension Office (Onslow County Multipurpose Complex) at 4024 Richlands Highway, Jacksonville.

April 12 (Tuesday) – Onslow County Beekeepers Association meeting, 7 pm.

April 9 (Saturday) - The Onslow County Farmers Market opens. The Farmers Market has three times and two locations: Tuesday and Saturdays from 8:30am - 1:30pm at 4024 Richlands Highway (at the Onslow County Multipurpose Complex) and Thursdays noon to 6pm at 1108 Western Boulevard (behind Dick’s Sporting Goods). Come by for seasonal local produce including fruits, vegetables, meats, cheeses, flounder and baked goodies. The Master Gardeners will also be available each Saturday to help answer your gardening questions.

April 16 (Saturday) – Rain Barrel Workshop, 10-3 at the Extension Office. Learn to build your own rain barrel or buy one already made. Cost is $35 (build your own) or $45 (premade barrel).

April 30 (Saturday) – Master Gardeners Plant Sale, 8:30-1:30 at the Farmers’ Market. We’ll have lots of great plants available and you can ask your Master Gardeners gardening questions. There will also be short classes on Japanese maples, growing centipede grass and Planting 101.

“HELPING PEOPLE PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK”
RECIPE CORNER

While we are gearing up for spring, many of us still have sweet potatoes, apples and pecans left over from the fall harvest. If you do, try this yummy recipe before spring’s greens come in.

Sweet Potato and Apple Casserole

Servings: 8

Ingredients:
- 3 sweet potatoes (peeled and quartered)
- 1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 cup chopped pecans

Directions:
1. Place sweet potatoes in a large saucepan with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil and cook 25 minutes, or until tender but firm. Drain, cool and cut into 1/4-inch slices.
2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Lightly grease a 7x11-inch baking dish.
3. In a small bowl, mix brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg.
4. Layer sweet potatoes, brown sugar mixture and apples in the prepared baking dish.
5. In a medium bowl, mix flour, brown sugar, butter and pecans. Sprinkle over the sweet potatoes.
6. Bake in the preheated oven 30 minutes, or until lightly browned.

Recipe courtesy of Robin Seitz, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent – Onslow County

CONTACT US

If you have questions about lawn, landscape, or garden problems, contact your local Cooperative Extension office. In Onslow County call 455.5873, Mon – Fri, 8 am and 5 pm, or visit us online anytime at http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu. While you are there, you can post your questions to be answered by email using the ‘Ask an Expert’ widget (in the upper left hand corner).

SPOTLIGHT

Extension Volunteers Recognized

The Annual Onslow County Agricultural Awards Banquet was held on February 10th at the Onslow County Multipurpose Complex. Recognition was given to the various groups of volunteers that give of themselves to support and expand the work of the NC Cooperative Extension Service here in Onslow County. During 2010, Onslow County Master Gardeners volunteered over 1,700 hours of service to local citizens.

Special recognition was given to Sandra Mihalcik and Tom Nicoll for their 500 hours of volunteer time as Masters Gardeners.

Special recognition was also given to Marion Goodman who was named the “2010 Master Gardener Volunteer of the Year” for her devotion to increasing the knowledge level of other master gardeners and the public.

Several local famers received awards for Crop Production Contests. Corn Yield Production Champion: George Davis and Stuart & Seth Howard of D & H Farms, Pioneer 1615 HR with 131.56 bushels per acre.

Wheat Yield Champion: Donnie Riggs, Pioneer 26R12 with 64.09 bushels per acre.

Soybean Yield Champion: George Pierce, Syngenta 68-D4 with 52.37 bushels per acre. The runner-up was David Collins, Asgrow 7502 with 50.86 bushels per acre.

The Onslow County Agricultural Hall of Fame Award was begun in 1984. The nominee can only be inducted to the Agricultural Hall of Fame once, as either a recipient of the Master Farmer Award or the James R. Strickland Service to Agriculture Award. This year’s inductee for the Master Farmer was Mr. Barry Shepard, and the Service to Agriculture was Dr. Danny Shaw.

On January 25th, 4-H recognized Rachel Dominessy as the 4-H Volunteer Leader of the Year. Along with Mrs. Dominessy, all 4-H volunteers were thanked and recognized for the years of service at the annual 4-H Volunteer Leaders Banquet. The theme this year was “We Are 4-H Then, Now, and Forever.
The Onslow County Extension and Community Association (ECA) celebrated their 2010 achievements on February 8th. The speaker for the event was Geri Bushel, ECA Advisor from NC State University.

The event started off with a memorial to ECA members that had passed away since the last Achievement Day. Several members were recognized for special awards. They are as follows:

**Perfect Attendance** – Several members were recognized for attending all of the club’s monthly meetings.

**Cofer Leader Program Award** – Barbara Crossman from the Harmony Club received this award for a lesson she presented to her club. All clubs voted on a member that had presented information during the year. Judges then picked the overall winner from reports presented to them.

**Most Outstanding Club Member** – The following members were recognized after being voted on by the club members as the club’s outstanding member:
- Jean Ross – Harmony;
- Janice Craun – Jacksonville;
- Alma Hemby – Meadow View; and
- Lura Hewett – Sneads Ferry.

**Most Outstanding Club** – This award is voted on by judges after seeing all the work done by a club’s members. This year’s award was presented to the Sneads Ferry Club.

**Extension and Community Associate of the Year** – This award is given to an outstanding member that goes above and beyond the call of duty. This year’s award was presented to Ruth Clifton.

Other awards were given were not available at the time of this release.

For more information regarding the Extension and Community Association, please call Peggie Garner at 910-455-5873.