# Pest Update (Dec 24, 2014)

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Note: samples containing living tissue may only be accepted from South Dakota. Please do not send samples of dying plants or insects from other states. If you live outside of South Dakota and have a question, instead please send a digital picture of the pest or problem. **Walnut samples may not be sent from any location – please provide a picture!**

**Available on the net at:**
http://sdda.sd.gov/conservation-forestry/forest-health/tree-pest-alerts/

Any treatment recommendations, including those identifying specific pesticides, are for the convenience of the reader. Pesticides mentioned in this publication are generally those that are most commonly available to the public in South Dakota and the inclusion of a product shall not be taken as an endorsement or the exclusion a criticism regarding effectiveness. Please read and follow all label instructions and the label is the final authority for a product's use on a particular pest or plant. Products requiring a commercial pesticide license are occasionally mentioned if there are limited options available. These products will be identified as such but it is the reader's responsibility to determine if they can legally apply any products identified in this publication.



## Timely Topics

We are experienced periods of freezing rain across the state. This weather has left many trees covered with a 1/8 to 1/2 inch glaze of ice. The ice weight is resulting in bent and broken branches. Here are a few do's and don'ts for dealing with ice on trees.

First, the "do's." If the lower branches on evergreens are bending, these can be propped up with boards

to keep them from snapping. If the branches have bend so they are already touching the ground, they should be left in place as the ice weight now being supported by the ground. However if the branches are at risk of bending farther, place a wooden support under the branch and gentle lift the branch up a little. The prop does not have to be high enough to restore the branch to its original position; it just has to support the weight.

Arborvitaes, an evergreen that typically grows from a clump of upright trunks, will often have the trunks bend outward and break from the weight of heavy ice accumulation. These upright trunks can be held upright by wrapping rope around them so they cannot bend outward. The rope should be wrapped just tight enough to hold the trunks in place, not to completely pull them together. The rope will need to be removed before spring; otherwise it could girdle the trunks as they begin to grow.

Props can be used to support the lower branches of deciduous trees. Apples, Amur maples and crabapples often have their branches or stems bend and snap in ice storms. Props can support the weight and prevent the stems from bending farther and breaking.

If the branches are already breaking, it is best to remove them with proper pruning. This will prevent the branch from tearing bark off the trunk when it does separate. This should only be done on small trees where the branches can be safely pruned from the ground. If the branches are high enough to require a ladder, the task is best left to professionals.

If branches have already torn away from the trunk, the torn stub should be properly pruned. There is no rush to complete this task as the tree is dormant but this pruning should be completed before the plant resumes growth next spring. If the torn branch stubs are too high to reach from the ground then this task should also be left to a professional tree company.

Now, the “don’ts.” Do not knock the ice from trees and shrubs. This force may break branches as well as dislodge ice. Also do not spray the plants with water to melt the ice; this may only result in additional ice build-up. Ice melt products

such as liquid magnesium chloride, should not be sprayed on the plant. While this may result in some melting, the chloride is toxic to plant tissue.

## E-samples

The funny growth on this hackberry is known as 'witches-broom' a relatively rare disease in South Dakota but it seemed I could find it on every hackberry back in Michigan. How and why the brooms develop on branches is not well understood. An eriophyid mite (*Eriophae*) is found in association with the brooms and also a powdery mildew fungus (*Podosphaera phytoptophila*) though the presence of the mildew does not appear to be a prerequisite for the disease. It may be merely invading buds already deformed by the mite, regardless these two are found with brooms. The disease may look bad, and the tree may be covered with brooms but it is not harmful to the tree. However, a tree loaded with brooms may experience more branch breakage in ice storms since ice accumulates easily in the brooms. There are no effective controls of witches-broom since the disease is so poorly understood; pruning out brooms is the only recommended practice.

## Samples received/site visits

Minnehaha County **What is chewing the bark from the branches of our tree?**

A favorite activity of squirrels during the winter months is stripping the bark from tree branches. They seem to particularly like smooth barked trees such as maples. There is little that can be done to keep them from feeding on a tree except exclusion. A metal collar at least 2 feet wide placed around the trunk at about 6 feet from the ground can discourage climbing (remember to remove the collar in the spring so it does not girdle the tree). However, squirrels can still jump from branches to access the canopy directly so prune off the lower 8 feet of branches and prune the side of the canopy to create 8 feet of clearance between the tree and any other high structure such as a building or other tree.



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