

# Pest Update (September 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.

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## Timely Topics



*What is wrong with my pines or spruce? The needles are turning color!* This has been a frequent call over the past several days as worried tree owners notice the needles turning brown or yellow. If the needles in the interior of the tree are turning yellow, then this is just part of the normal process of shredding the older needles. It occurs every fall but some years the process is more noticeable and

apparently that the case this year as the calls keep coming in. I have seen some white pines where the interior of the trees is almost a golden from the color change.

The needle discoloration and shedding is also normal for arborvitaes and junipers at this time of year. However, the color change actually appears as almost ribbons of yellow or brown running throughout the canopy rather than just the interior, though only the interior foliage is actually turning color..



## E-samples

**Fungus among us.** I have received pictures from several people of two fungi fruiting structure with the same questions; what is it and can I eat it? Apparently a few folks are trying to save some money on their grocery bills. First, do not get in the habit of identifying edible fungi from a single picture. Many fungi are poisonous and will either kill you outright or make you so sick you might wish you would die. If you are trying to save on the grocery bill, dumpster diving might be a safer option.

Having said that, the two fungi I have been asked to identify are part of the “foolproof four”, fungi that are generally easy to identify, hard to confuse with others, and are very tasty. However, do not collect fungi based solely on the pictures in this *Update*, nor the descriptions. Begin your mushroom hunting experience with an experienced person in the field.



Puffballs are a fall favorite. They begin appearing on the ground, usually on or very near rotted logs, sometime during late summer or early fall. They are very white, smooth and roughly spherical. The size ranges from a couple of inches in diameter to more than a foot. When the ball is split the interior should be uniformly firm and white with no gills present.

There may be a rudimentary stem at the base, but if there is a distinct stem running through the fungus from bottom to top or any gills appearing, it is NOT a puffball. Also do not eat puffballs that have tiny worms in them or ones where the interior is beginning to turn yellow. Puffballs are tasty when sliced thin (remove the outer skin) and fried in butter but they must be picked, prepared and eaten within a day. If you are not eating them within a day they can be stored in the refrigerator for another couple of days but they do turn mushy fairly quickly. Do not wash the puffball before storing; this will result in it turning to a spongy mush.



The sulphur fungus, also known as the sulfur yellow fungus or chicken-of-the-woods, is another common fall fungus known for its flavor. They appear on standing trees, sometimes near the base, other times 10 to 20 feet up on the trunk. I have even occasionally found them on rotting logs. The fungus forms yellow to orange fan-shaped shelves which usually overlap one another. The undersides of the shelves have a layer of very fine pores, NO gills. The fungus can be anywhere from a few inches to almost a foot in size. It is delicious, nice texture; some folks think it taste like chicken but really what doesn't? The fruiting structure can be used in many recipes (do not eat raw) and can be easily frozen to eat at a later time. An important note: the sulphur fungus is a tree decay fungus and the presence of this fruiting structure means that the tree is either hollow or has extensive decay. It might fall over soon!

If you find either the sulphur fungus or puffball this fall, you will probably be able to find them at the same location every year (unless the tree falls over in the case of the sulphur fungus).

## Samples received/site visits

Davison County

**What are these bugs on the birch tree?**



These are chafer (*Sercia*), insects closely related to rose chafers. These insect feeds on hardwood leaves, including birch, and while the adults are usually out from June to early September, we often have some that are still flying in mid-September. The adults can defoliate hardwood trees, but usually not enough to even notice the injury, though the insects are noticeable! The larvae feed in the soil and sometimes are a problem for nurseries.

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