

Maple Leaf Spots Tom and Debbie Ross High Country Nursery wnchighcountry@gmail.com

Many Maples including the Japanese Maple trees are extremely popular in home landscapes and usually do well with limited maintenance.

During our growing season we get periods of heavy rainfall and high humidity which are perfect conditions for fungal leaf spot. Most leaf spots need high temperatures, high humidity, and extended periods of leaf wetness to infect their host.

There are a few leaf spots known to affect maple trees. The first is called *Phyllosticta*, or purple eye. This is caused by the fungus *Phyllosticta*. On the leaves of maples the fungal spots can be round or irregular, and are about ¼ inches in diameter. They have purple margins with yellow or tan centers. A small black fruiting body will appear in the middle of the diseased area, somewhat resembling an eye. The good news is that *Phyllosticta* leaf spots are mainly an aesthetic issue and rarely pose any long term damage to maples.

Phyllosticta leaf spot is the most common disease I see on the leaves of Japanese maples, especially on the darker red varieties, such as “Bloodgood”. The disease appears as small, round bleached spots, easily contrasting the dark red of the leaves. However, it does affect some green varieties as well.

Another common leaf spot on maples is tar spot, which is caused by the fungus *Rhytisma acernium*. We normally see this disease in spring and early summer. Tar spot first appear as light-green or yellow round areas. These spots then develop a black, shiny, tar-like dot on the upper side of the leaves. In many cases, leaves with several spots will prematurely drop to the ground. This is another example of a leaf spot is more of an aesthetic problem.

Your best defense against these fungal leaf spots will be proper management. **Rake all of the leaves from around the maples in the fall and remove them from the property. The fungal spores survive the winter on the fallen leaves, so this will help remove much of the disease pressure.** However, I always see weedy red maples growing on roadsides all over the county, so the spores will always be present.

Pruning may also help control these diseases by allowing more air flow to dry out the leaves. Obviously, this technique would not have worked for us this year.

Chemical control is rarely needed, and is most often not feasible due to the size of most maple trees. However, some homeowners choose to treat their Japanese maples because they are small enough to easily spray and are expensive enough to justify the cost. Propiconazole, a systemic fungicide, can be found in the brand names “Bonide Infuse” and “Fertilome Liquid Systemic”. Chlorothalonil, a contact fungicide, can also be used against *Phyllosticta* leaf spot. It can be found under the brand name “Daconil”, which is the product name used by several different companies. Always read and follow all label directions when applying pesticides. I use Fung-Onil which is a “Bonide” product in my nursery which is a multi purpose fungicide- you can find it locally at garden centers or on-line on Amazon.