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Where Is The Color In The Fall Leaves This Year?

Sherm Thomson

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A weekly question/answer column

Where Is The Color In The Fall Leaves This Year?

Sherm Thomson answers:*

If you've driven through the canyons recently hoping for a visual feast, you may be disappointed. Because of higher than normal precipitation this year causing fungal growth and infections, there are several epidemic foliar diseases that will reduce the brilliant fall colors in some stands of trees.

- Some aspen trees are almost completely defoliated by aspen leaf spot. The fungus that causes it spreads rampantly during rains when the spores are splashed to new leaves. Dark spots develop and kill part of the leaf, causing it to drop prematurely. Consequently, there are no bright yellow leaves on many of the aspen stands in our mountains or valleys. This disease is usually not fatal to the trees. However, it does weaken them and repeated infections year after year will eventually kill the trees.
- Maple trees also have similar leaf spots caused by two different fungi; anthracnose and maple leaf blister. These are present on both the big tooth maple and the Rocky Mountain maple. The leaf spots cause premature leaf drop and will dim the normal bright red color in the fall.
- Any scrub oak trees along the Wasatch Front have become infected with oak leaf blister, which causes a large puckered gray spot on the leaves. It is usually not serious, but may also cause premature leaf drop.

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* Sherm Thomson is Utah State University Extension Plant Pathologist