**Tree Diseases of 2017**

The Kenosha County UW-Extension office fields inquiries from the gardening public on plant related issues. Master Gardener Volunteers, under the direction of the horticulture educator, are trained as Plant Health Advisors and staff a horticulture helpdesk to answer these inquiries which are received by phone call, email, or direct conversation.

Looking back at 2017, tree diseases were one of the main concerns brought to the attention of the Plant Health Advisors.

The easy to recognize tar spot of maples was again common this past year as it was in 2016. As the name implies, the leaves look as if they have been splattered with tar. Considered a cosmetic disease, it usually won’t hurt the health of the infected tree but mars the trees appearance. Attempt to control this fungal disease by raking and disposing of affected foliage.

The complete defoliation of some flowering crabapple trees by late summer may indicate the tree is suffering from apple scab. Symptoms of this fungal disease include dark brown leaf spots that may turn black, yellowing of foliage which eventually drops, and, in severe infections, deformed fruit. If apple scab continues to attack a tree from year to year, the early leaf loss affects the ability of the tree to photosynthesize resulting in decreased growth, diminished bloom, and increased risk of attack by other stressors. The best way to manage apple scab is to plant cultivars that are resistant to the disease.

Browning needles on spruce trees was another major concern in 2017. The main culprit for this was probably Rhizosphaera needle cast or Cytospora canker. With Rhizosphaera needle cast, the interior needles turn brown to purple-brown while the needles at the tips of the branches stay green. Typically, damage occurs at the base of the tree and moves upward. Trees infected with Cytospora canker display brown to purplish-brown needles, too, yet the affected branches are scattered throughout the tree, beginning at the lower branches. A whitish resin develops around the canker which usually forms on a branch due to a wound or another stressor. Keep spruce trees healthy to avert these two fungal diseases.

The Plant Health Advisors have regular office hours from 9:00 am to 12 noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday through the growing season (April through October) at the Kenosha County UW-Extension office in Bristol. They go semi-dormant from November to March but will still handle inquiries on a weekly basis during this time of year.

*Jeanne Hilinske-Christensen is the UW-Extension Interim Horticulture Educator for Kenosha and Racine Counties. Submit plant care questions to the Master Gardeners Plant Health Advisors. Leave voice mail at 262-857-1942 or email: master.gardeners@kenoshacounty.org*