

Spruce Spider Mite

Phil Pellitteri-U.W. Insect Diagnostic Lab

Spruce spider mites can attack a number of conifers including, spruce, hemlock, white cedar (arborvitae), larch and juniper. These mites go through 4-6 generations per year and can explode under warm, dry conditions. Spider mites feed by sucking on plant sap. Infested needles become mottled and appear yellowish to gray in color. Under heavy infestations needles can brown or fall prematurely.



Spider mite damage

Overwintering eggs

Because other conifer problems have similar symptoms the presence of mites or eggs are used for diagnosing the problem. Damage is more common on inner branches and areas protected from direct rain. Conifers hold needles for up to four years so damage is sometimes found only on represents an old infestation. Once damaged, needles will not recover even after the mites are gone. Plants should only be treated if mites are active or if numbers of overwintering eggs are found on shoots.

Control: Are the mites still active? Shaking branches over a white piece of paper is a good way to check. The mites are only 1/50 of an inch but can be seen walking on a light colored background. Heavy rains will wash mites off the plant and is a form of natural control. If large number of eggs are seen in fall plants should be checked in spring for sings of activity. Most insecticides are ineffective against spider mites, and frequent use of insecticides can cause mite outbreaks by killing predatory mites. Sprays containing insecticidal soap, horticultural oils or specific miticides (hexthiazox, bifenthrin) are effective controls. A forceful stream of water can also help reduce numbers.

For more information: Contact your County Extension Agent: