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**A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY
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Ash Tree Infected With Anthracnose

Our climate is usually characterized as being close to a drought with warm temperatures, almost daily winds and low humidity. Obviously, that does not describe the spring of 2011 in northwest North Dakota or northeast Montana.

With the cooler than normal temperatures and precipitation since April 1, which equals the amount normally received for the entire growing season, we can expect problems normally reserved for the far eastern section of North Dakota.

Several ash trees in the area have been hit by the disease known as ash anthracnose. Symptoms of the disease are premature leaf drop, black blotches on leaves causing leaf distortion and small brown leaf spots in the middle of leaves. The leaf symptoms may not necessarily be visible on fallen leaves since the infection that triggered leaf drop may be on the petiole or other inconspicuous location.

The pathogen that causes ash anthracnose is a fungus that overwinters in the upper parts of trees in seed samara, on twig cankers, and on any other plant part that remains attached to twigs, so raking and destroying fallen leaves and twigs may only help reduce inoculum rather than completely eliminate it. As a result, ash anthracnose is a recurring problem on ash as long as we have wet, cool weather in spring. It seems to vary in severity from one year to the next, and among individual trees. This is not surprising since the amount of inoculum can vary from year to year and from tree to tree.

If ash anthracnose is diagnosed, treatment with fungicides is usually not warranted. Fungicides are only effective as preventative treatments as leaves are expanding, so it is too late to protect trees this year. In general, ash anthracnose does not cause enough damage to stress trees in a single year, but trees that are heavily defoliated for three to more consecutive years can be stressed and susceptible to other pests that could kill them. On the upside, it may be comforting to know that trees can lose up to 25% of their foliage without major consequences in a single year. Lightly fertilizing trees that have lost a large amount of leaf tissue should help them refoliate and reduce stress. Heavy fertilization should be avoided.

High winds can also cause premature leaf drop, however, I don't recall this area receiving such winds, yet.

Since April 1, Williston has received nearly 10 inches of precipitation. This is approximately 6.5 inches more than the most recent 30 year average for the months of April and May. This area has already received precipitation equal to the average received during the growing season months, April through August.