

YARD & GARDEN REPORT

December 2013

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A year full of rain—A year full of wonder

The year 2013 will go down as a WET one. The gardening season started WET and it ended WET (Fig. 1). The very cold temps in spring just made matters worse.

All of this moisture made our landscapes lush and green—until they became full of diseases.

Yes, we were visited by bugs, too. Some new bugs. A new fruit fly came to our state and will threaten our berries from this day forward. The Japanese beetle made a return visit to our state; hopefully this pest will continue to die from our infamous winters. We still await the arrival of emerald ash borer; let us hope it continues to ignore us.

The days are getting shorter and our landscapes are falling into their winter slumber. Gardeners are resting too, but dreams of 2014 are already beginning as new seed catalogs appear in our frosty mailboxes.



Gardens sparkled in the abundant rainfall.

The year 2013 was a good year, and 2014 will be full of surprises. Mother Nature is both powerful and amazing, and it will be a pleasure to hold her hand and experience her majesty and whims in our yards and gardens next year. Happy New Year!

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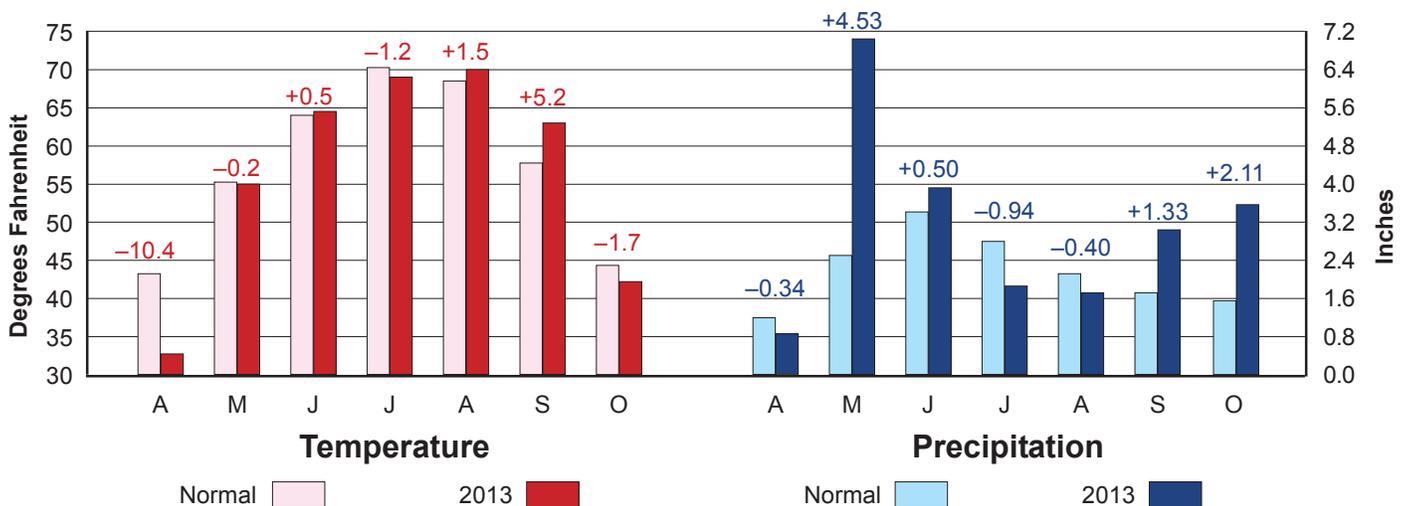


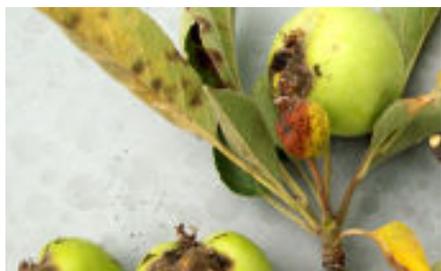
Fig. 1. The growing season started very cold and wet, transitioned to normal, and ended wet. Shown are composite mean monthly air temperatures and precipitation amounts in 2013 and normal (1981–2010) for scattered locations (Fargo, Grand Forks, Mandan, Minot, Dickinson and Williston). Source: ND Agriculture Weather Network.

Managing the Top 20 Troubles of 2013

As the year comes to a close, it's helpful to recall the major problems faced by gardeners this growing season. The understanding of these troubles will help to prevent them from happening again in 2014.

TREES AND SHRUBS

See also #12. Fire blight; #13. Black knot; #20. Slugs



#1. Scab on crabapple, apple

Leaves develop lesions, curl and drop. Fruit develop scabs. Rake fallen leaves and fruits to prevent infection next year. Prune established trees in March for more air and sun in canopy. If desired, spray trees with captan or chlorothalonil as leaves emerge.



#2. Anthracnose on ash, oak

Leaves develop brown lesions, later curl and may drop. Rake fallen leaves to prevent infection next year. Prune established trees in March for more air and sun in canopy. Young trees may be sprayed in spring as leaves emerge, especially if weather is wet.



#3. Rust on ash

Established trees tolerate rust. It is difficult to eliminate the sources of rust, namely cordgrass and marsh grass. Established trees may be pruned for more air and sun in canopy. Young trees may be sprayed in spring as leaves emerge, if weather is wet.



#4. Dutch elm disease

Major branch shows yellowing and wilting. Prompt removal of tree is often best. Burn or chip wood. If detected early, the fungus can be removed by pruning and/or fungicide injections.



#5. Herbicide injury

Leaves curl, cup, and/or stretch. Established plants can usually tolerate this stress. Use herbicides only when needed (autumn is best) and spray carefully. Tolerate a few weeds.



#6. Aphids

Sucking insects cause leaves to curl. Established plants can tolerate aphids. Young plants may benefit from a systemic spray of acephate or drench of imidacloprid. Control weeds.



#7. Stigmina on spruce

A new, aggressive disease. Reduce drought stress. Do not sprinkle water on branches. Space trees to allow for sun and air circulation; thin plantings as they mature. Apply chlorothalonil for 4–5 years on infected plantings.



#8. Iron chlorosis

Iron is locked in soil due to alkalinity (high pH). Spray small trees with foliar fertilizer containing iron (Mir-Acid). Mature trees may be injected. Get soil tested and acidify with sulfur, if needed.



#9. Winter injury

Dry weather in late 2012 contributed to drying of needles over winter. Keep evergreens healthy and well watered heading into winter. This should be less of a problem this winter due to our abundant rainfall in fall.

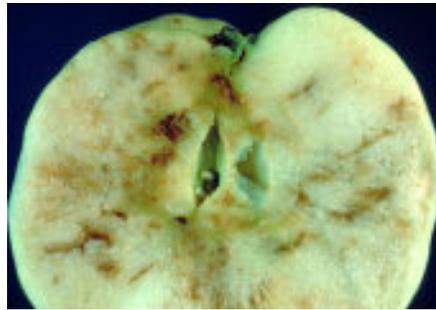
FRUITS

See also #1. Scab; #20. Slugs



#10. Russeting on apple

Corky scars develop but do not affect flavor. Caused by frost in spring, fungal infection, or use of pesticides under very hot temps. Prune in March to open canopy and reduce diseases.



#11. Apple maggot

Fruits develop dimples where flies laid eggs. Maggots hatch and create trails inside fruits. Pick up fallen fruit. Hang traps to monitor for flies, which appear in July. Insecticides can protect fruit.



#12. Fire blight on apple, pear

Heavy rains and hail open wounds and this bacterium enters. Prune infected tips, going 8+ inches into healthy wood. Sterilize shears between cuts. Remove prunings.



#13. Black knot on cherry, plum

A perennial threat due to abundance of infected wild chokecherry trees. Prune infected tips, going 6+ inches into healthy wood. Sterilize shears between cuts. Remove prunings.



#14. Mold, mildews on grape

Rains promote infections in vines and fruit clusters. Remove infected fruits and fallen leaves. Prune for more sun and air circulation in vines. Captan and copper sprays will protect fruit.



#15. Fruit fly on cherry, berries

Spotted wing drosophila, a new pest, attacks fruits while ripening (previous fruit flies attacked only overripe fruit). Monitor with baits of sugar, water and yeast. If found, spray with insecticides such as malathion. Pick fruit regularly.

VEGETABLES

See also #20. Slugs



#16. Washed out gardens

Heavy rains in spring may wash out gardens, requiring replanting. Rain penetration and drainage can be improved with addition of organic matter (peat moss, compost, rotted manure). Mix an inch of this in your soil every fall or spring.



#17. Blight on cucurbits

Several pathogens attack the vines of squash, melon and cucumber. Clean up garden. Next year, look for disease-resistant varieties. Space out plants. Avoid getting foliage wet. Do not irrigate at night. Fungicides (chlorothalonil, mancozeb, maneb, copper) can prevent spread.



#18. Blight on tomato, potato

Early blight cause vines to die back, reducing yields. Clean up garden. Next year, space out plants. Consider staking or putting mulch under tomatoes. Avoid getting foliage wet. Do not irrigate at night. Fungicides (chlorothalonil, mancozeb, maneb, copper) can prevent spread.

FLOWERS



#19. Black spot on rose

Dark lesions appear on lower leaves, working their way up the shrub. Keep foliage dry when watering. Fungicides can protect healthy foliage. Use disease-resistant varieties. Prune to improve air movement in shrubs.



#20. Slugs

Slugs thrive in moist weather, particularly in shaded areas. Hosta, impatiens, strawberry and vegetable seedlings are frequent victims. Diatomaceous earth and iron phosphate are non-toxic and can be sprinkled near sensitive plants for protection. Boards laid on the soil or pie tins filled with beer can trap slugs.

HAPPY THOUGHTS



Silver lining to the rain clouds

Our yards and gardens faced many threats this year, but there were lots of good news, too. The rains gave us lush lawns. There were no exceptionally late frosts in spring or early frosts in fall. Japanese beetle has yet to survive our winter. Emerald ash borer ignored us. Soil moisture is good heading into 2014. We have lots to be thankful for!



Holiday plant care



Poinsettia

Poinsettias thrive in bright light. Dim settings will cause leaves to become dull and drop. Room temps are best. Keep the plant away from cold drafts of windows as well as warm drafts from heating vents and televisions. Avoid overwatering the plant—plants wrapped in foil are most susceptible. Poke holes in the foil to let excess water drain out.



Christmas tree

Recut the trunk an inch or more up from the original cut and put it into water as soon as possible. Set the tree in a cool place. Keep the tree stand full of water; check daily. You do not need to add 7-Up, sugar, aspirin, or any commercially available additive to the water.



Decorative branches

Branches of redtwig dogwood, yew, arborvitae, juniper and winterberry (shown) are beautiful in decorations. Holly is not hardy in North Dakota, but winterberry is. 'Red Sprite' is an award-winning variety. It grows 4 feet tall and prefers a moist, acidic soil. Plant one male, which is fruitless, for every three female bushes. The male 'Jim Dandy' works well.

Gift ideas for gardeners

The holidays are here—and so are the busiest shopping days of the year.

Selecting the right gift can be a challenge sometimes. It's nice to know that many of our friends enjoy gardening. Here are a few gift ideas to consider:

Let's start with a beautiful flowering houseplant. The delicate blooms of a cactus make it a special gift. Poinsettia and azalea also add dazzling color to the holidays.

Foliage houseplants make a nice gift that can provide for years of pleasure. Put the plant in a colorful ceramic pot to add a special touch. Give them a Norfolk Island pine (which looks like a tiny Christmas tree) and decorate it with ornaments.

A potted amaryllis is fun to grow. Your friend will be amazed on its rapid growth and fabulous flowers.

A dried flower arrangement is another colorful gift idea that provides long-lasting beauty.

A paper pot maker can turn old newspapers into seed starting pots. Soil block makers are another way to make your own plant pots. A heating mat can get the transplants off to a strong start this spring.



Garden plants and accessories make great holiday gifts!

Good pruning tools are always appreciated. A new shovel, spading fork, or quality hoe may not seem like a showy gift, but it will touch the heart of a true gardener.

Consider giving some accessories such as a pocket knife, pair of gloves, or a kneeling pad. Maybe add a set of automatic watering globes—they even look like Christmas ornaments!

Racks that dry herbs, scissors that mince herbs, and crocks for pickling are thoughtful gifts.

Give a subscription to a gardening magazine and they will remember you all year. Popular magazines include *Country Gardens*, *Fine Gar-*

dening, *Garden Gate*, *Horticulture*, *Organic Gardening*, and *Northern Gardener*.

Thermometers, soil thermometers, and rain gauges provide valuable information to a gardener.

Hand scrubbing lotions are available that clean and moisturize the best tools of gardeners: their hands.

For the gardener who seems to have everything, wind chimes and spinners can add pleasing sounds and movements to a landscape. Gnomes and other gardening ornaments may be a risky gift, but such gifts can bring the biggest smiles!

Happy holidays!



A blooming cactus, watering globe, and a sleeping gnome will bring happiness to your friends.

Gardening tips for December



Mulch plants

If you have not done so already, mulch your tender shrubs and perennials. Apply 4–6 inches of straw or hay. This mulch will protect plants from bitter temps, prevent premature sprouting, and protect roots from soil movement caused by freezing/thawing cycles.



Prevent salt burn

Deicing salt can burn plants. Apply deicing compounds down the middle of walks and drives, avoiding the edges near grass and shrubs. Sand or kitty litter can provide traction and minimize the need for salt. Keep in mind which areas in your landscapes are most often damaged by deicing salts—water these areas in early spring to flush the salts out of the soil. Lastly, consider using deicing salts that are less harmful to plants, such as calcium chloride (instead of sodium chloride).



Brush snow off

Heavy loads of snow can damage the branches of shrubs and trees. Brush the snow away using a gentle, upward, sweeping motion.



“Living” Christmas trees?

Not recommended. These living trees are purchased from nurseries, brought into the house and decorated over the holidays, and then planted outside. They rarely survive w/o major damage.



Caring for houseplants

Shorter days and cooler indoor temps slow down the growth of houseplants. Most plants do not need fertilizer. Avoid overwatering, especially with succulents and cacti.

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