

Weekly Column
Ericka Soumare
Purdue Extension, Elkhart County
Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator
Phone: 574-533-0554
17746 C.R. 34, Goshen, IN 46526

Yellow Needles on Pine Trees

The pine trees in the yard were growing beautifully and then all of a sudden, yellow patches everywhere. You wonder what could cause this to happen. Is it some type of disease or unseen insect? Well, it would be encouraging for some to know that this yellowing of needles could very well be a natural occurrence that will not harm the tree. It is called fall needle drop of pine and can happen every 2 to 4 years in the fall. It is simply the shedding of old needles to make room for the newer ones. This is why, despite the yellow patches, there are still a lot of green needles on the tree.

There are situations that can cause the appearance of discolored needles to be more profound. If the tree is experiencing some type of root stress or is weakened by dry weather in the summer months, this can also affect the level of fall needle drop. It is important to be sure that the tree is in an area that has a favorable soil structure. For this reason, a pine in clay soil may have more fall needle drop. As long as the new growth is coming out green, the tree should have no problem recovering its full green appearance in the future.

If you are concerned with the location of your tree and would like to make sure it is growing in a favorable location, there are steps that can be taken to ensure this. In times of dry weather, at least 1 inch of water should be applied around the tree. This is equivalent to letting the water source go at full capacity for about 1.5 hours. Keep in mind that the water needs to be going in the ground where the root system of the tree is, which would be as wide as the branches are spread. This is why watering just near the trunk of the tree will not be effective.

For more information on fall leaf drop, you can visit the web at <http://www.ppd.l.purdue.edu/PPDL/weeklypics/10-16-06.html>. You find information about fertilizing woody trees and plants by visiting the web at <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/HO-140.pdf>. You can also contact your Elkhart County Extension office for more information at 574-533-0554.

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