Leaf scorching

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DURING the summer months, leaves of many plants develop browning and scorching which progresses inwards from the leaf margin or downwards from the leaf tip. The affected parts become dry and brittle and may break away from the remaining green areas.

A large number of species may be affected, including ornamental trees, certain orchard trees, shrubs and other plants. Two plants which are very susceptible to this type of injury and are rarely seen without it are the loquat tree and the butterfly tree (Bauhinia).

Causes

The causes of leaf scorch are many and varied but generally it results from the failure of sufficient water and nutrients to reach the leaves concerned. This may seem to suggest that the plants have been underwatered. This is often true, but not always, because it sometimes happens that with abundant water supplies, scorching may occur and it is then that one or more of the following factors may have been responsible.

1) Dry hot weather. This is common in summer in Western Australia and evaporation from leaves is often so rapid that the roots cannot replace the moisture loss quickly enough.
Exposed windy situations. Constant exposure to drying winds causes excessive moisture loss from plants.

Fertiliser “burn.” This is due to excessive amounts of fertiliser, especially if placed too close to the plant.

Salt. Salty soils aggravate leaf scorching as also does the use of water with a high salt content.

Inadequate nutrition. “Complete” fertiliser mixtures, e.g., containing sulphate of ammonia, superphosphate and potash are better than those containing only one of these components. Potash deficiency, for example often causes leaf scorch.

Root injury due to implements.

Poor root system. This may result from waterlogging.

Root parasites, including fungi and eelworms.

Control

Liberal supplies of water are necessary in hot, dry weather.

Situations sheltered from prevailing winds are preferred. Otherwise winds breaks should be provided.

Artificial fertilisers should not be applied in excessive amounts or placed too close to the base of plants.

Avoid soils or water with too high a salt content.

Provide adequate nutrition by using “complete” fertilisers. Liberal supplies of potash in the mixture are often an advantage.

Avoid unnecessary root injury with cultivating implements.

Provide adequate drainage to prevent waterlogging.

Examine the root system for evidence of abnormalities, such as rotting or swellings. Swellings are commonly caused by root knot eelworms. The control measures to be adopted would depend upon the casual organism involved. Typical specimens would need to be submitted for diagnosis.
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