

Tree Line



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association

February 2011

Special point of interest:

◆ 2-Day Pest Management Class

The University of New Hampshire Extension will be conducting a Christmas tree pest management workshop March 16-17 in Keene, N.H. For more information, visit http://extension.unh.edu/FWT/docs/ChristmasTreePestcourse_2011.pdf or call (603) 862-3883.

◆ Farms for Sale?:

On occasion, the NHVTCTA receives calls inquiring about possible tree farms for sale. If anyone has or knows of any, please let Jim Horst know, (802) 447-1900.

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Winter Meeting Recap

The NHVTCTA held its annual winter meeting Jan. 25 at the Canadian Club in Barre, Vt.

One key part of the event was a round robin discussion about the just-completed sales season. Members attending the meeting almost universally reported reported very strong sales seasons, with the majority of growers selling out. The debate turned to the wisdom of raising prices slightly in response to the abundance of customers and the shortage of trees (particularly taller trees). "Price is the last thing people ask about when they come to cut a tree at the farm," agreed many. Concerns were expressed that customers might become frustrated after their favorite farm sells out of trees and turn to artificial trees instead. Wholesale growers, too, reported strong sales, though many said that orders from customers came later in the season than normal.

Rick Dungey, representing the National Christmas Tree Association, was the primary guest speaker at the meeting and was happy to hear how well growers in New Hampshire and Vermont had fared. "That's great. A rising tide floats all boats," he stated, but added that "nationally, the percentage of sales of real trees was down, and eventually a receding tide will mean that you won't sell out."

While many are focused on trying to promote the environmental benefits of buying a real tree versus a plastic tree, Dungey explained that the top three reasons people cite for not buying real trees are: the hassle, fire danger and allergies.

The third factor, allergies, is a relatively new concern being



Rick Dungey, representing the National Christmas Tree Association, spoke about national sales, marketing and media trends.

voiced by consumers, and influenced largely by the purported research of one scientist in Connecticut claiming that real trees cause allergies in the household. Dungey recalled how he quickly responded on behalf of the NCTA when this research first made its way to news outlets, and continues to battle reports of allergies. When it comes to such issues in the news, "it doesn't matter what the reality is, only what the perception is," explained Dungey.

He also provided some advice for growers when contacted by reporters. Dungey cited past examples when news outlets carried stories on how spring frosts or summer dry spells would adversely impact the quality and number of trees available later in the year. "No matter what, tell the reporter the truth," he advised. "But also emphasize a positive message. I always tell reporters, 'People will

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President's Message: Marketing matters

Hello to all and I hope everyone is keeping warm in this cold weather! While the below zero readings are a nuisance and sometimes dangerous I think it is a blessing in disguise by warding off some tree diseases and pests that the milder climates do not! So when you go out to your car and freeze your fingers loosening your wipers keep that in the back of your mind!

We had an excellent meeting in Barre with the highlight being the presentations from Rick Dungey. The real world examples of the industry's shortcomings through poor customer education and growers' inability to do simple things to remedy these problems were put out there on the table for us all to see. We should all be doing the little things like providing literature with simple instructions on tree care and recycling information. This will cost us little to nothing and in

the long run keep existing real tree customers returning by making their experience hassle free and enjoyable. I thought I was doing a stroke of business by providing this information for my mail order customers, but then I realized that is only 10% of my tree sales. Next year everyone who purchases a tree from my farm or from wholesalers who sell my trees will have this information available to them.

Another point I would like to stress is the Check Off program. Please take the time to go onto the Web site www.christmastreepromotion.com and fully read the details of the program and submit a comment. I am in favor of the program, but I do have some reservations about some of the details and I voiced them in the comment I submitted. It is not going to be perfect but the way I see it is that we have three choices:

1) Stay with a voluntary

donation marketing campaign and limp by.

2) Try the check off program for 3 years and survey the results. If we are not happy do away with it.

3) Do nothing and hope sales stay at current levels.

I don't know about you, but I don't like the hope option when we are talking about our livelihoods and future.

Lastly, please consider becoming a member of NCTA if you are not already. At least your membership dues might keep Rick at his computer for a little longer each year to combat the huge financial resources promoting the plastic tree or correct a ridiculous comment from an influential doctor or scientist that is hell bent on making a name for himself by bashing our product.

*Respectfully,
Jay Weir*



New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association



2011 Officers

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2011 Tree Line Publication Schedule


Issue	Ad/Submission Deadline
January	--
June	June 3
September	Sept. 2



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Member Perspective: NHVTCTA Tree Improvement Effort

By Bob White

For as many years as any of us have been growing trees there have been efforts to try to help us all improve our practices and techniques in growing a better tree for our customers.

To that end a group of growers will be working together looking at trees on host farms and attempting to identify potential practices etc. that could make a difference for each farm and then present those findings during our field tours.

As we all know there can be many issues effecting tree health and each farm can have a wide range of issues, some good, some not so good. An easy area to focus on as an assoc. is soils and nutrients available to our trees. We have learned a lot about soil issues that effect our farms this year.

We have done soil and foliar analysis at 6 farms so far that hosted or will host a meeting in 2011. The results were very surprising so far, as we generally all have the same issues.

In all cases the analysis work which cost 40 dollars per farm

identified clear issues that adversely affected our trees. Unfortunately it appears our practices have very slowly gotten us into trouble over the years with imbalanced soils. As most farms interplant the problems get worse with each new rotation, many of us do not rebalance the soils regularly if at all.

Once we get into trouble it has been hard for us to understand the problems and find solutions to get out of trouble. A few highlights to consider.

In general we are low in most soil nutrients on all farms, however PH seems to be our largest issue.

Of the 6 farms sampled 5 had lower soil PH, one had very high PH. The further the soil PH moves away from 5.5 the worse the plant nutrient imbalances gets. Off colors, poor growth and vigor, needle casts etc.. all start to show up.

Our farms generally are in the 4 to 5 PH range, the main cause of this is our continued use of nitrogen fertilizers and how we spread it, which over time strips the soil of calcium down to about

the 8 inch depth, we want about 55% of the soil base saturation made up of calcium for a healthy tree, we are seeing samples as low as 3% calcium.

Dolomite lime is the first step to getting soils rebalanced in low PH conditions for fir trees, (not the inexpensive calcium lime that is widely available) as we also all need magnesium which dolomite has. The challenge is getting this into the soil in our no till environment which is a long process at best.

Tests are being done with some extremely fine lime to see if that can make a difference faster. Most likely most of us should be adding some dolomite lime annually as we fertilize. Strongly suggest not using quick lime, it will adjust PH rapidly but kills all soil bacteria in the process.

Annual soil tests are a cheap and accurate guide, (14 dollars spectrum labs) compared to potentially wasted fertilizer applications with the wrong materials. If your trees are in trouble like mine were I would also suggest foliar testing (26 dollars) again very cheap compared to longer rotations in the field and poorer quality trees.

Spectrum's (Fertilizing Christmas Trees) handbook which is on the web and free is the best guide I have ever read, suggest everyone get a copy.

Phosphorus is critical for plant growth; however it does not move much in the soil, annual top applied material works well for grass etc, or any plant that has roots in the top inch of soil. Unfortunately we are finding some farms have no roots in the top layers of soils at all.

Fraser and Balsam should have noticeable roots near the surface. They may not be there due to our use of herbicides, or some other factors, but if roots are not on the surface your tree will most likely have trouble finding phosphorus and will suffer.

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Winter Meeting Recap continued

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have no problem finding a quality tree this year.”

Dungey recommended that every tree be sold with a pamphlet that includes tree care tips on one side, and local tree recycling contacts and information on the other side. He also stayed in the area for another day to provide a detailed look at marketing strategies at a session for interested members held at The Rocks in Bethlehem, N.H.

Also at the meeting, Jay and Christie Weir offered a visual overview of their experience attended the 2010 NCTA Meeting Field Tours in North Carolina, and shared some of what they had learned from visiting the farms and meeting growers in that area of the country.

Finally, the NHVTCTA took the occasion of its winter meeting



Sherwin Davis, center, receives an honorary lifetime membership to the NHVTCTA from Walt Rockwood, left, and President Jay Weir, right.

to present a certificate and honorary lifetime membership to Sherwin and Doris Davis.

Presenting the award on behalf of the association was Walt

Rockwood, who recounted the many years of service and extraordinary dedication Sherwin and Doris provided to the NHVTCTA and its members.

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Update on Westar and Glyphosate in tree plantations

John F. Ahrens

Many of you have been controlling weeds with Westar (sulfometuron or Oust plus hexazinone or Velpar) applied in the spring, before conifer bud break. Our experiments have shown that this is an inexpensive alternative to control most weeds for most of the growing season.

Like any herbicide treatment, however, Westar has limitations. For example, it does not completely control several perennials, including smooth bedstraw, horsenettle, milkweeds and certain woody plants. It also has allowed the annual crabgrass to invade in June or later, depending on the season (rainfall and temperatures) and, of course, the dosage of Westar applied.

The perennial weed and brush problems can be solved by using the standard of Roundup (glyphosate) in the early fall (after Labor Day) when the true firs and spruces are hardening off and are increasingly tolerant of glyphosate. The dosage of 1 1/3 qts. (43 ounces) of Roundup Original or equivalent usually is

adequate for these weedy escapes. However, you do have to raise the off-center nozzles high enough to allow spray coverage near the tops of the weeds. Lowly-set nozzles (6 to 12 inches) usually will not hit enough of these weeds to kill them.

Adding a quart of Roundup Original or equivalent to the Westar in the spring, just before conifer bud break, has controlled smooth bedstraw in our experiments, but perennials such as milkweed, horsenettle and woody plants emerge later and are not controlled with glyphosate in early spring.

Summer invasions of crabgrass may or may not be a serious problem in your plantation. Crabgrass emerging after most conifers have made their seasonal growth has not usually affected tree growth in plantations, although it may look bad. However, if you want to control it in early summer you can apply Roundup + Goal 2XL + Stinger at 4+16+4 ounces of product per acre, preferably before the weeds get above 12 inches high. If using

Goal Tender 4F, rather than Goal 2XL, the dosage is 8 ounces per acre. This controls broadleaf as well as grassy weeds, stunts most perennial weeds and grasses and is safe over actively-growing conifers in plantations as well as transplant beds and 2nd year seedbeds.

Another way of preventing (reducing) summer invasions of crabgrass is to add 5 ounces of Velpar 75 DF to 6 ounces of Westar before conifer bud break.

Many growers question the safety of conifers when using Westar several years in a row. We are partially responsible for that because we are conservative and we just did not know. Even now, I can only hazard an educated guess. If one applies Westar at 6 oz/A per year, I do not think there will be a problem of herbicide injury with annual use. If one is applying the maximum suggested rate of 12 oz/A per year, the first thing I would do is cut back on the dosage to 6 oz/A per year.

Colorado spruce trees are

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Questions?? contact Bill Asack evenings 6-8 pm. 1-802-754-6934.

Sun Safety in the Field

Editor's Note: It may be hard to believe now, but warm weather will soon be here, and it's never too early to think about sun safety when working in the field this summer. The Iowa State University Extension put together this information especially for farmers.

Long days outside in the warm glow of summer can be a serious hazard. In recent years, scientists have found that environmental pollution may deplete the earth's ozone layer that protects the surface from the sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation. Researchers also are learning more about the relationship between these invisible sun rays and various forms of skin cancer and diseases such as eye cataracts.

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that annually one million new cases of curable basal cell or squamous cell cancer will be found, but most of these will be treated successfully. The death rate for melanoma has increased about 3 percent per year since 1981. Persons with white skin are 10 times more likely to have it than African Americans, but anyone can get skin cancer, regardless of skin color. These trends have serious implications for farmers and others who spend much of their working hours outdoors.

Sun exposure

Research has shown that cumulative sun exposure is a major factor in development of skin cancer. Small changes occur in the skin each time it is exposed to sunlight. People who burn easily, rarely tan, freckle or have a fair complexion, have blonde or red hair, or have blue or gray eyes, experience greater skin changes. Skin cancer usually is not associated with a single, painful sunburn, but rather with repeated exposure to the sun and

changes in the skin's makeup. The sun's rays are more damaging during summer months and at midday hours than other times. However, you can get a sunburn on a cloudy day during other seasons and at other times of the day. Cumulative sun exposure is the major concern.

If you notice a new growth, mole, or discoloration, or a sudden change in an existing mole, see a physician. Early detection of skin cancer is the first step for successful treatment.

The back of the neck, ears, face, and eyes are sensitive to sun exposure. Luckily, these and other body parts easily can be protected by wearing proper clothing, sunglasses, or sunscreen. By taking precautions and avoiding the sun's most damaging rays, you may be able to reduce your risk.

Hats

Protection for the face and other parts of the head can be as simple as wearing a hat. A classic study by the Wisconsin-based National Farm Medicine Center found no "perfect hat" among 11 styles, however, some are better than others.

When selecting a hat, consider the following questions, and balance your needs in each of these areas.

Coverage: How much of your face, ears, and neck are shaded by the hat? Although the baseball cap has been the farmer's trademark, it does not protect vulnerable areas on the ears, temples, face, and neck. Other hats provide better protection, such as widebrimmed hats, pith helmets, hats with double brims or removable flaps, and an Australian-style cap with a full brim.

Coolness: Is it cool enough to be worn on hot days? The hat also must be practical for other conditions, such as high humidity, strong winds, blowing dust, and sporadic rain showers.

Comfort: How does the hat feel? Will it stay on during vari-

ous tasks? Can you wear it around animals or in close quarters? Does it limit vision or hearing?

Commitment: Will you wear it? The most well-designed hat is ineffective if it's seldom worn.

Clothing

Clothing helps block the ultraviolet rays (UVR) of the sun when it covers the skin.

Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks. You probably don't need special clothes for sun protection if your clothes are washed in detergents with fabric brighteners, because they act as UVR absorbers. Closely woven or knitted fabrics are more protective because they lack open spaces to let UVR through to your skin. Clothes dyed in dark colors (black, navy, red) have more dye to absorb UVR and shield your skin than light colored ones.

Sunscreens lotions

Parts of the body that are not covered by clothes can be protected with sunscreen lotions. Sunscreens are not a substitute for wearing proper clothing. They also can give users a false security.

Sunscreens recommended for outdoor workers should have a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of at least 15. This means that you are protected from a reaction to the sun's effects 15 times longer than you are without the sunscreen. Read the label to know when to re-apply sunscreen and whether it is water-proof.

Sun avoidance

The easiest way to reduce exposure to ultraviolet radiation is to avoid the sun. Critical times are midday hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. This may be impossible for some active individuals, but scheduling tasks around this period could reduce exposure when the sun is most dangerous.

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Member Perspective: Tree Improvement Effort

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Weststar and red fescue grass are two potential causes for the roots to go deep.

Foliar fertilizer applications on nutrient stressed trees at my farm were very successful this year and provided rapid improvement that was not possible in the short term with ground applications on low PH soils.

Understanding what materials to use and how to apply it successfully is not hard to learn but would not suggest attempting it without expert advise. As an association we hope to do further testing and trials at host farms looking for potential options that could help each of us better balance the soil and find quick options to help stressed trees when needed.

Gordon Page has reported that the foliar and ground fertilizer trials that we did at his farm during the fall meeting were a success and saw noticeable improvement. Bill Huxster who is a Fraser expert from North Carolina gave us recommendations and worked with us on the Page farm.

The NH/VT growers who will work together to try to help us better understand tree issues at the host farms are Jay Weir, Mike Godzyk, Larry Downey, Greg DeCell, Russ Reay, Bob White.

Information from the analysis work on the 6 farms—Fraser Fir

	Soil	Foliar in the plant	Amateur comments
PH	5 low 1 high	-----	Likely our number 1 issue, use dolomite Lime to increase and Am sulfate to Decrease
Phosphorus	5 of 6 low	All low	slow growth etc.. plant uptake issues
Potassium	All Low	All Good	low Ca and Mag caused potassium to Increase, Dolomite lime would help
Calcium	5 low 1 very high	4 of 6 low	Dolomite lime is the answer, gypsum is quicker but won't last
Magnesium	All Low	5 of 6 low	Dolomite lime again in low PH
Sulfur	All Good	All Good	
Boron	All Very low	All low	Granular fert is not very effective Suggest Solubor in herbicide mix or foliar
Copper	All OK	5 low 1 high	Careful too much is harmful, use Foliar Spray, Maybe in fungicide
Iron	All very high	5 low 1 high	Yellowing trees, foliar iron is quick and effective, PH again is issue
Manganese	All ok	5 High 1 Low	Yellowing trees, PH again is the issue, maybe in fungicide sprays
Zinc	All low	3 low 3 good	foliar works

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Sun Safety

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Sunglasses

Even the most effective hats can block only 50 percent of the ultraviolet rays that reach the eyes. A good shade hat combined with the use of sunglasses is a better way to protect eyes from sun exposure.

Use caution when selecting sunglasses because they vary widely in the amount of protection from ultraviolet radiation.

A peel-off label on the lens indicates its UV rating, or percentage of ultraviolet rays blocked by the sunglasses (the best rating is 100). If no information is provided by the manufacturer, the sunglasses may not offer any added protection.

Remember that people who spend a lot of time outdoors in work or leisure activities can suffer from more than just exhaustion or heat stress. They are at risk for skin cancer and other diseases that result from years of exposure to the sun. Be aware of the risks and make it a habit to protect yourself from sun exposure.

2011 Penn State Short Course

This 2-day program will highlight many of the key pest and cultural management aspects involved with operating a Christmas tree farm.

February 16

9:00 am to Back to Basics

This workshop will address all the key cultural and management topics critical to producing a quality Christmas tree. The session is ideal for anyone new to the business and new farm employees.

9:00 am Struggling to Customize a Weed Control Program for Each Farm.

10:00 am Minimizing the Impact of Needle Cast Diseases

10:30 am Break

10:45 am Improving Pesticide Safety on Your Farm

This presentation will review fundamental pesticide safety issues and provide a roadmap for improving pesticide storage, handling, and use on your Christmas tree farm.

11:45 am Pennsylvania's New Christmas Tree Pest Manual

12:00 pm Lunch

1:30 pm Understanding Your Soil and Its Drainage Properties

3:00 pm Break

3:30 pm Taxes and Christmas Tree Farms: Paying More Than You Should?

4:00 pm "That's a Good Idea" Contest. Ever have a great idea pop into your head that allowed you to work smarter rather than harder? Come prepared to share your good idea with the group and qualify to win an excellent prize.

4:30 pm Evaluations and Dinner on Your Own

7:30 pm Identification of Conifer Insects, Diseases, and Abiotic This evening session will provide hands-on practice identifying common conifer pests and problems.

February 17

8:30 am to Conifer Grafting Workshop

8:30 am Pests That Are Real Pests

9:30 am Plant Inspection and Regulations: Cut Versus Dug

10:00 am Break

10:15 am The Art and the Science of Producing a Quality balled-and-burlapped (B&B) conifer.

11:15 am Alternative Methods to Control Leader Growth Chemical and non-chemical control methods and techniques

12:15 pm Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Association Update

12:30 pm Lunch

1:45 pm Know Your Nozzles: What Spray Tip Works Best For You?

3:00 pm Personal Protective Equipment—It's Not Just the Law

For registration information, contact Dr. Rick Bates, Telephone: 814-863-2198 or e-mail: rmb30@psu.edu

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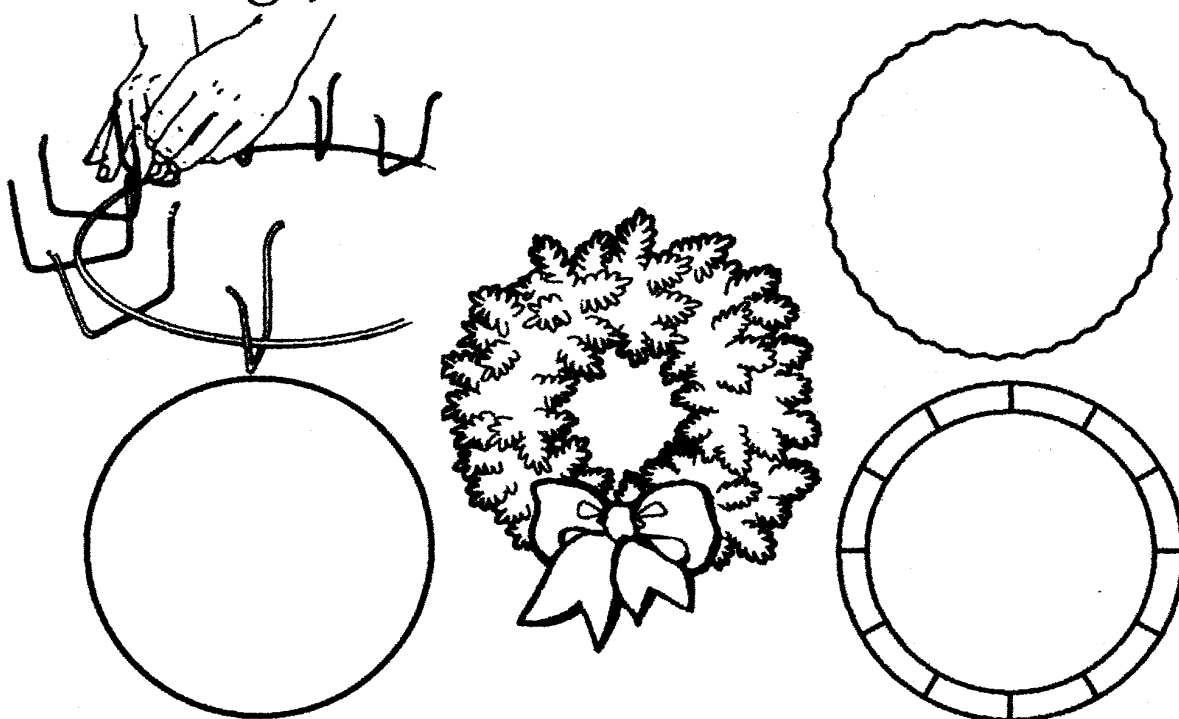
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Update on Westar and Glyphosate (continued)

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especially sensitive to Westar, and we have had growth suppression with Westar during the first 2 years of establishment. During that period, a better choice for Colorado spruce is SureGuard at labeled rates.

Switching herbicide programs from year to year makes sense also from the weed resistance standpoint. We are fortunate to have several options for weed control in areas where Christmas trees are grown. It is wise to alternate programs and reduce chances of weed resistance.

We caution against using Westar if you spot treat and don't calibrate your sprayer. The danger to the trees is just too great when rates of Westar are not carefully controlled.

What about applying Roundup this late in the season (November)? The truth is that you can kill "most weeds that are

green" with Roundup at 11/3 qts /A in the fall, but weeds that are affected by frost, such as ferns, bindweed and deciduous woody plants, are not controlled by late season applications. Perennial grasses such as quackgrass, orchardgrass, timothy, and smooth brome grass can be controlled, however.

Another reason for late season treatment with Roundup is that white pine or Douglas-fir are quite sensitive to glyphosate until surpassing about 2 ft. in height. As the season progresses, their tolerance increases. Even then, over-the-top treatment with glyphosate should be avoided in these conifer species.

One thing to remember about using glyphosate in the fall, especially in late fall, is that dew often is heavy in the morning and may not dry off until noon or later. Heavy dew will dilute glyphosate, which is absorbed by foliage, and allow it to run off

onto the soil, where it will do no good. I believe that it is best to delay spraying glyphosate until the weed foliage is dry. With pre-emergence herbicides, such as simazine, the presence of dew is of no consequence.

Another thing to remember when spraying postemergence herbicides, such as glyphosate, in cool weather, is that weeds take longer to die than at warmer temperatures. Do not expect to see weed kill within a month or more. We have sprayed weeds with glyphosate in early December, and not seen them die until unsprayed growth started in early spring!

This information was first published in The Real Tree Line, Nov. 2010. If you have any questions on vegetation control in Christmas trees, you may call me at 860-683-4985, e-mail - john.ahrens@ct.gov or Dr. Todd Mervosh at 860-683-4984, e-mail - todd.mervosh@ct.gov.



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