

Juniper Diseases

07.06.2017

Q. Some of the branches have turned brown on my juniper shrubs. I have had these same shrubs for years and they have been getting the same care as always but suddenly they have browning tips and branches dying. Can you tell me what is wrong?

A. Junipers make for hardy trees and shrubs in the landscape as they withstand cold, heat and drought with ease. However, despite their resilience, junipers are prone to a couple of diseases and insect infestation that cause browning. Bagworms, spider mites, and the fungal diseases, tip blight or twig blight, may cause the branches and twigs to lose their vibrant green color.

The symptoms of branches turning brown could be caused by several things. Browning and dying branch tips may indicate an insect infestation such as spider mites. You can check for this by holding a piece of white paper under a juniper branch and shaking it. Look at any small specks that fall on the paper through a magnifying glass. If you see brown, red, green or yellow eight-legged insects, your juniper has spider mites.

Twigs and branches dying back could indicate juniper tip blight. To control prune out dead tips making sure to go into the green part of the branch at least two inches. Clean pruning shears with 10% bleach solution or rubbing alcohol between cuts. Bad fungal infections can be controlled with copper spray. Junipers need air flow to avoid fungal disorders so cleaning up around the shrubs and pruning out any dead wood is important. It is also important to keep branches dry during warmer weather so avoid overhead water or watering too often during the summer months. If the drainage is poor, the plants may develop root rot causing the whole or parts of the plant to die. I do not think this is the case with your shrubs as you said they have been growing in the same place for years.

Entire branches dying back especially on larger shrubs or juniper trees may be due to twig blight. This is caused by cankers. This disease can also cause foliage on infected branches to turn yellow or brown and wilt.

According to the UC, IPM site "A canker is a localized dead (necrotic) area on branches, trunks, or roots. Cankers vary greatly in appearance but are often a circular or oblong lesion that may be discolored, oozing, or sunken. Cutting under cankered bark usually reveals discolored tissue, which may have a well-defined margin separating it from healthy tissue. When cankers entirely

circle (girdle) stems or trunks, foliage turns yellow or brown and wilts as the plant dies outward or upward from the canker.” Infected bark often discolours and may exude copious resin. If you think you have blight or canker prune out infected branches, again making sure to clean pruners between cuts. For further information, go to

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/GARDEN/PLANTS/juniper.html>

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