Fungus attacks some maples

Raking, bagging can help deter giant tar spot

By Joshua Brown Free Press Corresponder

Mysterious black spots appearing on maple leaves throughout Chittenden County have some homeowners and tree lovers worried.

"It looks like it was hit by an oil spill," said Mike Egan, holding up a leaf near his house on Catherine Street in Burlington.

Stay calm and keep raking. The splotches are a case of "giant tar spot," a fungus that infects only Norway maples. Although new to the area, it's a familiar sight in other parts of the country

It won't hurt you - or

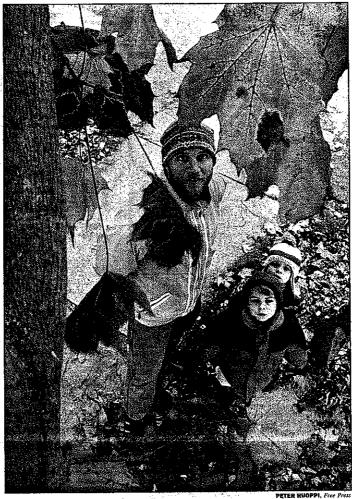
"I've gotten more calls about these tar spots than anything," city arborist Warren Spinner said. "It has caused some defoliation, but the trees will recover." the trees will recover.'

Dr. Dale Bergdahl, a plant disease expert at the Univer-sity of Vermont, says smaller varieties of tar spot that in-fect red, sugar and silver ma-ples are well-known in the area, but the giant tar spot is a new arrival. He noticed a few trees in Burlington with the giant tar spot last year, the first time he had seen it in the city. This year the inky bumps are hard not to notice, especially in places with many Norway maples, such as Shelburne Farms and Burlington's Hill Section.

Although rakers have been wondering about the blighted leaves in recent weeks, the disease has been there for months. Spring's cool, wet weather created ideal conditions for the spores of the fungus, overwintering in the leaf litter, to infect many new

Pale yellow patches of the fungus have been visible since June, but these didn't develop into eye-catching black bumps until late in the summer. By the time tar spot has developed, leaves have mostly finished their photosynthesis for the year.

See FUNGUS, 6A



Jim Sullivan and his son, Magnus, 5, and daughter, Francie, 3, have noticed black tar fungus on the leaves of the Norway maples outside their Burilington home.

What is giant tar spot?

- **WHAT:** Rhytisma acerinum fungus, or giant tar spot, creates large black "tar drops" on maple leaves. The fungus survives through the winter on fallen leaves. In the spring the spores infect young maple leaves.
- TREE HEALTH: No long-term damage. BEST TREATMENT: Rake and then com-
- WHERE TO COMPOST:
- ck yard (turn pile often to keep hot).
- Burlington leaf pickup begins next week on the same day as regular recycling.
- Intervale Compost Products: 282 Intervale Road, Burlington. Open 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Special leaf drop-off 8 a.m.-4 p.m. today: 660-4949.
- FUNGICIDE: Not effective against the wide
- NEXT YEAR: The tar spots might return, nding on the spring weather.

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Many people are only now noticing the spots as they stuff leaves into paper bags.

from Mike Egan's house, Jim Sulliike black-eyed peas." Pushing his A few doors up Catherine Street arrival from West Virginia. 'It looks wo children on a swing hanging guess I better get raking soon," he yard. "I've seen ... (the tar spot) all over town," said Sullivan, a recent van stood in his leaf-covered back from a tree, he looked around. "

That's the best treatment for the tar spot. Raking and composting leaves can kill the spores, Spinner said. With high levels of the fungus in the area, though, another wet spring could bring a repeat of this year's blight.

tisma acerinum, that appears on the Bergdahl says the giant tar spot is an exotic European species, Rhyupper leaf surface of Norway maoles. It forms an unsightly blotch the size of a quarter or bigger."

These large spots distinguish it cause "dime-sized" or "pinhead" infections onred, sugar and silver maples. This year, the other tar spots said. Only the giant tar spot seems from two other tar spot species that a "very low incidence," he to be widespread. have

troduced to the United States in the late 1930s. Towns in upstate New York have been troubled by early since the 1980s, but the disease has become much more common in the leaf drop caused by the tar spot Giant tar spot was probably in Northeast in the last decade. Bergdahl has seen it in Vermont for the ast three years.

Despite its recent spread, the

ominous looking giant far spot is just a "curiosity," Bergdahl said, pean import. Once championed as a The real problem is the seemingly innocent Norway maple itself. Like the fungus, these trees are a Eurosood landscaping tree for their abilty to withstand poor growing conditions, the Norway maple has escaped cultivation and become what oining the ranks of unwanted speecologists call an "invasive exotic, cies, like zebra mussels.

The city of Burlington stopped planting Norway maples as a street tree by 1984, Spinner said, but it is rampant in urban hedgerows and damages native forest stands, seeding itself across the landscape. Some homeowners and tree-care companies still plant the Norway maple.

"We shouldn't be planting it," Bergdahl said. "It's crowding out our native sugar and red maples."