

Diplodia pinea

Some pine trees in the Permian Basin recently and rather suddenly displayed a lot of dead needles. What's going on and what can be done about it?

A sudden change in growing conditions often predisposes a tree to opportunistic disease-causing agents. Above average rainfall and spring hail storms set the conditions for pine tree problems.



What do we know?

The problem is complex. Rather than being widespread across the Permian basin, sick Afghans initially appeared to be mostly confined to home landscapes in areas that received extensive rainfall and hail damage. Samples from these areas were submitted to the Texas A&M plant pathology lab where a fungus called *Diplodia pinea* was found. This fungus can cause dieback of tips and limbs.

While the samples were being analyzed at the lab, certified arborists Mark Walter and Leslie Oldham confirmed the presence of high pine tip moth larvae populations in weakened pines.

Trees under stress are susceptible to attack by both pests. Overwatering, underwatering, too much or improper fertilization, poor pruning techniques and physical injury are all factors that may cause stress in trees. It is highly probable that these opportunistic plant destroying pests have been thriving in certain stressed trees. Pine tree damage has likely been worsened by a combination of factors (increased warmth and humidity) that favor an increase in these pest populations.

What can be done?

Arborists recommend that homeowners and landscape professional exercise good lawn sanitation practices. Rake up fallen twig and needle debris. Avoid pruning, without a goal. Fertilize prescriptively based on what your soil contains and what your tree needs. When the soil is saturated from rainfall, turn off the irrigation to minimize tree stress.

If you suspect you have a sick tree, contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office at 432.686.4700 or a certified arborist. Visit <http://www.treesaregood.org> to locate an arborist.

Probably less threatening is a tiny wasp. A few trees growing in commercial locations along Wadley have also shown injury from a tiny chalcid wasp. This isp was known to attack afghan pines during extended drought. Perhaps excess rainfall is another condition that predisposes Afghans to this pest too.

