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Protecting Leyland Cypress in the Landscape

Leyland Cypress has become one of our most popular landscape trees. It's fast growing, works as a formal hedge, screen, buffer strip or wind barrier. When most of us gave up on our beloved red tip photinias, Leyland Cypress was a natural replacement. They grew 3 to 21 feet per year even in the poorest of soils. However, you know what they say when something seems too good to be true. There are some downsides to almost anything, including Leyland Cypress.

Yes, Leyland Cypress are relatively pest free, but they are shallow footed and often planted too close together in poorly drained soils. This tree is best suited for fertile, well-drained soils. When forced to live with wet feet, they are prone to root rot diseases and a couple of damaging canker diseases. These diseases seem to be hastened by prolonged periods of drought.

You don't have to look far to find Leyland Cypress trees that are suffering from these diseases. The two most common diseases are called Seridium Canker and Botryosphaeria Canker. It's not too important to know how to pronounce or spell these diseases because the symptoms are similar and there aren't many diseases of this tree. If you have noticed scattered reddish brown dead twigs on otherwise apparently healthy trees, it's probably one of these diseases. Now there are some technical differences. One difference is that you should see a considerable amount of oozing resin or sap if its Seridium Canker.

There are no chemical control measures for either of these diseases. The best approach is to prune out infected twigs or branches. When doing this, prune at least 1" inside healthy tissue and remember to dip pruning tools in a 10% chlorine bleach solution after every cut. Pruning will be a challenge, if not impractical, in instances where trees are large.

These cankers are more common when Leylands are stressed. Of course, we haven't exactly recovered from the drought so they have been and are stressed in most cases. Try to mulch to conserve what moisture we have and when possible, irrigate. Remember, that deep watering once or twice a week is better than shallow waterings daily.

Leyland Cypress should still be considered for use in the landscape. Remember, to establish new plantings in tilled, well-drained areas. Taking the time to till areas 3-4 times the diameter of the root ball and amending the soil will ensure success. Also, when establishing avoid overwatering to prevent root rot diseases.