

Powdery Mildew on Dogwoods

Q: Hello. I'm new to NE TN, moved up from FL last fall. We have a home on seven (mostly) wooded acres. I'm interested in keeping my woods healthy but have found few resources here. This past year it seems all the dogwoods were affected by two things: powdery mildew and the long periods of drought we had at my specific location this summer. What can I do to treat the grounds to help keep down the powdery mildew? Previous owners did nothing: apparently not even fall leaf cleanup. We are mulching the leaves in the tended portions of the woods. I know that's not ideal, but it's too much to rake or remove (exposing a hard clay surface as well). Is there a treatment I can use to deter the powdery mildew? Also, would it be good to mulch around some of the dogwoods with a layer of compost in the early spring? Thank you.

A: Thank you for the question. It's one a lot of people in this area have been asking this year. Powdery mildew is widespread due to the high humidity and cool nights we have in this area during the summer months. Unfortunately, the heavy nighttime dew in this past summer only encouraged the fungi to spread even more. The good news is that there are some actions you can take to reduce the growth of the powdery mildew fungi.

First, you can prune some of the branches to increase air flow through the trees. This will help the leaves dry faster after rains and evening dew. Below is an excerpt from a University of Tennessee (UT) paper on dogwoods called "Dogwoods for American Gardens" (PB1670),

"Once a dogwood is planted and established, it needs little or no pruning. Remove dead, diseased or broken branches as soon as they become apparent. Remove any suckers that appear at the base of the trunk, especially on grafted trees. Otherwise, pruning is a matter of personal preference. Some people prefer the limbs to branch out low to the ground. Others may prefer to remove low limbs or trim back limbs near a walkway or against a house. Multiple trunks may be either eliminated or retained. In any case, make pruning cuts clean and nearly flush with the remaining branch. Leave only a "shoulder." Never leave a branch stub. Pay attention to borer prevention practices, because pruning wounds are attractive to borers and serve as entrance sites. Late winter to early spring is the best time for pruning. Pruning may be done any time it is needed, but most practitioners prefer the dormant season. Rapid spring growth will begin the healing process faster than at any other time. Even pruning during bloom is not damaging to the tree and can sometimes yield some nice branches for decoration indoors."

Always use sharpened tools, because the smoother the cut, the faster the wound will heal over.

Here is another website that details the pruning methods for landscape trees from Purdue University. <https://extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/FNR/FNR-506-W.pdf>.

You may also want to get rid of any fallen leaves with the powdery mildew to help prevent spreading of the fungus further to your other trees.

Lastly, if your trees are heavily infested or the above doesn't help, you may have to resort to using a chemical fungicide to reduce the growth of the fungi. UT Extension Service document SP370-B "Powdery Mildew of Ornamentals" lists the most effective chemicals and mixture recommendations as determined by the UT Extension Service. These chemicals can be found at local greenhouses, as well as home and garden stores.

Mulching can be done anytime. Composting and mulching around your trees help retain ground moisture and moderate the temperature around the base of the tree. Mulching helps break up the hard,

packed clay we all have up here. UT recommends 2-3 inches deep and 4-6 feet in diameter around the trunk. Remember to not pile your mulch, compost, or leaves around the trunk of the tree creating the dreaded "mulch volcano". Mulch volcanos encourage insect invasion and more fungus development to harm your tree. Best mulching practices are discussed in the University of Iowa paper "Using Mulches in Managed Landscapes" (SUL12).

Welcome to Northeast Tennessee! I hope this answers your questions. You can search the Internet for the publications mentioned above. Please reach out to us again if we missed anything or for any other gardening questions. We appreciate you contacting us. Another great resource is the UT Extension Office near you in Hawkins County, here is their information:

UT Extension Hawkins County
3815 Hwy 66 South
Rogersville, TN 37857
423-272-7241
www.hawkins.tennessee.edu

Happy fall gardening from your friendly master gardener!