

Gopher control... better late than never!

In the past week I've made calls on three different orchards where trees were yellowing or had see through canopies and small leaves. In each case, trees in the orchard were dead or dying. Although root rot, oak root fungus, or union mild etch on Marianna 2624 rootstock was suspected, gophers were the cause of significant tree losses in each case. Gophers chew off roots and chew off the bark all the way around the trunk at the crown right down to the wood. If you dig around a sick tree and find the bark missing, you can bet that gophers are the culprit.

Gophers are active all year and now is still a good time to work at reducing their population. It's easy right now to see new signs of their activity because weeds are being controlled for harvest and fresh mounds are evident. If you carry a probe with you and use it each time you see fresh mounds, you can sharply reduce the gopher problem in your orchard. Be persistent.

Gophers eat year around. Once you control weeds in your orchard for harvest what do you think they'll be eating? If you see active gopher mounds now you can be certain the gopher will be feeding on your trees as harvest approaches. Gophers can damage any age tree and I've seen 10 year old trees killed by gophers. The easiest trees for a gopher to kill are those from two to four years old because they can girdle them quickly.

The longer gophers work on trees, the weaker the trees become. Oftentimes the damage doesn't become apparent until the year after the injury has occurred since it may take awhile for the root system to starve and decline. Remember, the leaves manufacture sugars that are translocated down through the phloem to feed the root system. When gophers chew off the bark and phloem the pipeline to the roots is missing and the root system gradually starves.

If the gopher doesn't kill the tree directly by girdling, the damaged roots or crown become avenues of entry for crown gall and wood rots. Wood rots weaken the structural strength of roots and the crown and contribute to tree losses in windstorms.

Gophers are a serious problem but they can be stopped. Don't pass up this opportunity to control gophers in your orchard by using a probe now.