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Planting When It's Cool

When should we start, and when should we stop? Those are two questions asked this time of year when conditions seem okay for planting (or the calendar says they should be) – until all of a sudden they're not. It's then we might question whether the planter should still be running.

There are a couple of types of 'injury' that occur around planting. One is imbibitional chilling. It occurs when there is a change in *water* temperature as the seed is taking its first drink in the first six to 24 hours after planting. Water temperatures attributed to imbibitional chilling are generally 45 degrees F and lower and often associated with colder temperatures and rainfall in that early period after planting. The second is cold injury. This is more common *after* the first 24 hours post planting and mostly with *soil* temperatures dropping in to the low 40's and below.

In reality, whether its cold injury or imbibitional chilling is much less relevant than the possible result (NOTE: cold injury is *typically* less severe than imbibitional chilling damage). We may see seeds with reduced vigor or even seedling death, with damage levels dependent on the level of temperature drop, how long cold temperatures persist, and seed quality to start with.

Good agronomic practices (high quality hybrids/varieties, planting when forecast conditions are favorable for early growth, etc...) will help overcome many of the cold weather/ soil issues we face. Still, early planted fields deserve extra scouting as they emerge so stand decisions can be made before it's too late. We have to balance the acres we have to cover with the weather we have to do it in, but an understanding of how cold injury works can mean the difference between stopping a little early – and a complete do over.

Evergreens Not Green

As everything tries to start greening up this time of year, sometimes plants that are supposed to remain green are actually going backwards. The explanations are numerous.

Some of the brown could be disease. This is particularly true of pine species exhibiting pine wilt or tip blight. Evaluate pines now. If it's tip blight, consider a fungicide treatment (sometimes it's too late, but...). If it's pine wilt, it's time to get trees removed and discarded.

If the damage is on semi-evergreen shrubs like euonymus and boxwood, it may be the result of sudden temperature drops last fall. If moisture has been adequate, most of this damage is likely foliar only and buds will be fine (if drier conditions persisted, the damage could be worse). Monitor through spring (in to mid-May) giving plants a chance to develop new growth. You can also split buds. If green inside, there's still hope for new growth.

If the discoloration is on junipers, it may be natural. The male flowers of eastern redcedar, etc... are brownish and look like a cross between a miniature hand grenade and a pinecone. Shaking branches on dry days may result in the release of a pollen cloud. If seeing the discoloration on only half of the trees, its might be the male flowers and should fade with time.

Still not sure? Drop us a line and we'll discuss even more options.