

Spruce Spider Mite

Oligonychus ununguis

Symptoms & Damage

- Needles become mottled off-green or yellow, then bronze; inner, older needles drop prematurely.
- Fine webbing may appear at needle bases; heavy infestations can defoliate branches.

Cause

- Overwinters as tiny reddish eggs on buds, bark, and needles.
- Larvae hatch mid-March to April; feed during cool, moist conditions in spring and fall.
- Summer temperatures (> 80 °F) suppress activity; up to 6–10 generations per year.

Prevention & Cultural Controls

- Keep trees well-watered and reduce stress; drought worsens infestations.
- Regularly wash foliage with a strong hose to dislodge mites and eggs (especially spring and fall).
- Preserve natural predator mites, ladybugs, lacewings, and spiders.

Treatment Options

- **Organic Solutions**
 - Hose-spray foliage weekly or bi-weekly to knock off mites.
 - Apply insecticidal soap or horticultural oil targeting eggs and adults.
- **Chemical Treatments**
 - Use labeled miticides or horticultural oils in spring/fall when mites are active.
 - Be cautious: insecticides may harm mite predators and reduce control.
- **Best Time to Treat**
 - Early spring (April–May) and early fall (September) when mite activity is high.

Plant(s) Affected

- Conifers: spruce (Colorado blue, Norway, Dwarf Alberta, white), fir, pine, juniper, arborvitae, Douglas-fir, hemlock, yew.

Additional Notes

- Dense interiors can hide mites; thorough washing is crucial.
- Do not use dormant oils on dwarf spruces (e.g., Alberta); may harm foliage.
- Regular monitoring via “tap test” (white paper under branches) helps early detection.

