

# Strange Behavior For Red Leaf Japanese Maple

**Dear Plant Doctor:** My wife and I purchased a red leaf Japanese Maple in early April of this year. The tree was approximately 4.5 feet tall when it was planted. The nurseryman told us that this tree was a slow-growing tree and rarely needed to be pruned.

In just four months, the tree has grown to 8 feet tall and has a very thin main stem! In addition, the plant has three other shoots (at least two feet long) that are growing straight up. We have tied all the shoots to a stake because the shoots fall over if not staked.

Is this normal? What should we do?—**Sunset Beach**

**ANSWER:** Sounds like strange behavior for a Japanese Maple. Most selected clones or grafted cultivars of Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) are small, slow-growing trees. However, I have found that great variability (for vigor, shape, size, color, etc...) exists for open pollinated seedling trees. I suspect that you have purchased a seedling tree or a tree that the grafted top has died, leaving only the seedling rootstock.

Check with the nurseryman to see if you purchased a seedling or a grafted plant. Grafted Japanese maples can be quite expensive, and it is common to see plants valued in the hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Seedling plants are generally inexpensive when compared to the grafted plants. Be advised that no one can guarantee what seedling plants will look like when they mature, but in general, Japanese maples do not require much shaping or pruning.

**Dear Plant Doctor:** I have a problem with a weed (sample enclosed). This weed grows in my lawn and garden. It is difficult to pull-up. What can I do to control this problem plant?—**Sunset Beach**

**ANSWER:** You have enclosed one of my favorite plants of the N.C. coast. The Pennywort, Dollarweed, Coastal Plain Pennywort, Water Pennywort and Whorled Pennywort (genus *Hydrocotyle*) are all native residents of sandy, wet, salty soils along the coast.

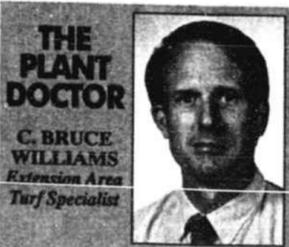
The round umbrella-like leaf of this evergreen perennial plant spreads rapidly through sandy soils by rhizomes. Pennywort is beautifully adapted to the sandy soils of the coast, and I would encourage anyone with beachfront property to cultivate and not kill this plant. Pennywort does a great job of holding the sand in place and makes an attractive ground cover by itself.

A member of the same plant family as the carrot, parsley, celery, and dill, the pennywort is often hated by lawn aficionados. Effective control of this weed in most warm season grass lawns can be accomplished by multiple applications of Ortho Weed-B-Gon Weed Killer, 33Plus, Weed-B-Gon for Southern lawns, or similar broadleaf herbicides containing 2,4D, mecoprop and dicamba. Herbicides are most effective when the weed is actively growing.

Directed applications of Roundup or Finale should control this plant in plant beds. Be careful not to allow the herbicide to contact any desirable plants. Multiple applications will be required. Follow all label instructions and precautions of any pesticide you use in your lawn or garden.

**Dear Plant Doctor:** I started my lawn in late May with a centipede-carpetgrass mixture. In mid-July I spread Scotts Turfbuilder and the grass was a deep green for several weeks. However, I am now getting several patches of grass looking like the enclosed sample. What is the problem?

When is it okay to put down annual ryegrass? What about "weed and feed" for centipede-grass? If you



**THE PLANT DOCTOR**  
C. BRUCE WILLIAMS  
Estimation Area  
Turf Specialist

**ANSWER:** The grass you enclosed for identification is a mixture of smooth crabgrass (*Digitaria ischaemum*) and large crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*). A centipede-carpetgrass lawn mixture is a great choice for a low-maintenance lawn. However, you will be limited on what you can use to control crabgrass in this lawngrass mixture.

Pulling crabgrass out by hand is the best solution. Other methods of removing crabgrass are unacceptable. For example, Vantage (sethoxydim) is an excellent herbi-

cide that will kill all grasses except centipede-grass (so all your carpet-grass would be killed by this herbicide). Crabgrass herbicides for use in bermuda or zoysiagrass, like MS-MA or DSMA, will kill both centipede and carpetgrass.

The only practical chemical control for crabgrass in a centipede-carpetgrass mixture is to prevent crabgrass seed from germinating in the early spring and summer by the use of preemergent herbicides. Consider using preemergent herbicides products that contain one or more of the

following products: benefin, oryzalin, bensulfide, DCPA (dacthal), or pendimethalin.

Since the uses of these herbicides vary so much with the type of grass species, be sure the formulation you purchase is labeled for centipede and carpetgrass lawns. Preemergent herbicides are best applied in the spring when soil temperatures are approximately 55°F or during dog-wood bloom.

"Weed and Feed" type fertilizers do not generally perform well on centipede-grass lawns for two rea-

sons. First, these products must be applied early in the spring for maximum herbicide effect. Early spring fertilization of centipede-grass leads to disease problems and early stand loss. Second, the rate and distribution of the herbicide is usually insufficient to give acceptable levels of weed control.

Read next week's column to learn about overseeding. I will be dedicating an entire column to the topic.

Send your gardening questions and comments to the Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia NC 28422.

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