Weird Weather in 2023 – A Look Back
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Looking back on the past year, 2023 was a singularly weird one as far as weather events go. It was kicked off by a very warm fall that had a sudden plummet in temperature into the teens the week of Christmas. A lot of evergreens did not harden off before that occurred, and damage to rhododendrons, azaleas, hollies, and inkberries, to name a few, was moderate to severe, with some plants suffering severe leaf damage or leaf drop by January. A hard frost occurred in spring when many fruit trees were flowering, and peaches, plums and other tree fruits had little fruit in some areas of the state.

In mid-February 2023 we had warm weather that produced a winter fog which rolled in as temperatures dropped below freezing. Several regions of Connecticut had rime ice form on trees and shrubs that lasted for as long as three days as cloudy, cold weather continued. Some trees like red maples, already had swollen leaf buds and thick, clear ice covered them. Damage was moderate to none as the sun did not appear before the ice melted.

A week later there was a hoar frost which occurs during clear nights as temperatures drop. Hoar frost is more crystalline and feathery than rime ice and looks like sugar crystals on leaves and stems of plants.

A wet spring resulted in a high incidence of *Exobasidium vaccinii* galls on some rhododendrons and azaleas. These leaf galls are very heavy and as they age, they develop a white coating of spores.

During a hike, I came across a small pile of white pines that had recently been cut. The cut ends had a reddish pink tint to the sap, which was a new one to me. Our forestry expert said that I took the picture likely within hours or at most a day of the cut, and the tree was still photosynthesizing. Carbohydrate compounds produced by photosynthesis in the sap reacted with the air and oxidized or developed some fungal stain. This is why pines are not harvested for timber during the growing season.

Canadian wildfires affected our air quality, especially during early summer. Ash in the sky made for a hazy, almost fog-like appearance to our air, especially if you looked down into low areas. A lot of perennials grew exceptionally tall during this three-week period as they reached upward for light.

It was also a very wet year, with almost weekly rains, cooler temperatures and sometimes very heavy downpours that occurred in short periods of time. Water made both gardens and lawns mushy as soil was slow to dry out. Flooding along the Connecticut River also destroyed some crops or rendered them unsafe for consumption. Native maples had brown shriveled leaves in late summer as a result of an anthracnose leaf disease brought on by extended humid conditions earlier in the year.

This year was a good one for fungi. Last year with the heat and drought, there was a dearth of mushrooms, but this year there were plenty to be found. This year I found my first netted stinkhorns and several earthballs plus plenty of varieties of coral fungi that seemed to be everywhere in the moist woods.

Slime molds were also prevalent, especially in lawns and in moist woods. Some look like puffballs, especially the wolf's milk slime mold. The fruiting bodies are pink and have a slimy pink interior where the spores are found. Many slime molds look like tiny dots on tree trunks and logs in woodland areas.

This year was a mast year for many trees including oaks, Eastern red cedar, Atlantic white cedar and white pines. The ground underneath pines and oaks were covered in acorns and cones in the fall.

Summarizing the year- plants either seemed to do well or were damaged by ice, late frost, wet soils, high humidity and wildfire haze. Although it was nice to at least have some rain after last year's drought, too much is not always a good thing. Next year will hopefully be a more typical one for our area.

Dr. Suess had a good weather tip: "The storm starts, when the drops start dropping.
When the drops stop dropping then the storm starts stopping."

For all your gardening questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or www.homegarden.cahnr,uconn.edu or your local Cooperative Extension Center.