

Release

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission



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Browning, dropping pine needles not (necessarily) cause for concern

Pine trees, particularly longleaf pines, can shed their needles in the summer

Homeowners and forest landowners may become alarmed by the appearance of brown needles on pine trees, particularly longleaf pines, in the sandhills and coastal plain regions of the state during the summer.

This is a normal occurrence, as even evergreens have to shed their foliage sometime.

The needles falling off now were produced two years ago. Normally two-year-old needles fall off in the fall, but if it is especially dry, they will fall off in the summer. This doesn't mean the trees are sick or dying; losing the older foliage helps reduce water that has been lost through transpiration (water evaporation via the leaves).

Trees are very good at recycling nutrients, and old foliage is one of the most expendable resources for trees. Nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus and magnesium are mobile elements, and the tree is able to remove these from the foliage and store them elsewhere before the foliage drops.

However, some important elements, particularly calcium and manganese, are not mobile and are lost with the foliage. Older needles containing these elements fall to the ground and serve as a natural mulch, holding in moisture for the trees and decomposing over time, making the nutrients available again.



This July 1 photo of young longleaf pine trees at the SC Forestry Commission headquarters in Columbia shows the typical browning of needles common in hot, dry months.

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The mission of the South Carolina Forestry Commission is to protect, promote, enhance and nurture the forest lands of South Carolina in a manner consistent with achieving the greatest good for its citizens. In addition to being recreational hotspots for hiking, biking, hunting, camping and horseback riding, the Commission's state lands are demonstration forests for ecological responsibility and productivity. The state's largest manufacturing industry in terms of jobs and wages, forestry generates an \$18.6 billion impact on South Carolina's economy.

