Tar Spot on Northern Maples

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This spring's exceptionally cool and moist weather resulted in a number of fungal diseases which have infected our trees and landscapes in St. Louis County. Perhaps the most prevalent of these has been "tar spot" on maples. The common name for this leaf spot disease is very descriptive as the leaves appear to be spotted with black tar. **As unsightly as this may be the disease has little impact on the overall health of the tree. Chemical controls are generally not recommended.** All infected leaves should be cleaned off the ground and removed from the site, buried or properly composted. By disposing of the infected leaves the number fungal spores and the disease pressure is reduced. Chemical fungicides may be necessary if a young tree is infected for two years in a row or if mature trees are infected in 3 out of 5 years. Fungicides containing copper such as Kocide and Champ may be applied if control is needed. These materials must be applied as a preventative, early in the season, before the symptoms (black spots) are observed. Three applications are generally advised, at bud break, when the leaves are half extended and when the leaves are fully extended. Remember that controls are generally not needed and the disease may not occur in subsequent years.