

## What's Wrong with my Plant?

I have come to the conclusion that Central Florida is the best place to live; not only for people, but also for insect pests and plant diseases. In Florida, people visit for vacation, they were born and bred here while others retire; there is no difference with insects. Notice, however, that because we Floridians are aware of our diverse pest population we tend to blame all plant problems on insects and diseases. There are so many things that we do in our landscape that can affect plants that are not related to pests. Before blaming the problems on insects or diseases, let's think about the many things that can make your landscape go wrong.

Soil problems – If the soil has a compaction or drainage problem, the plant roots will be affected. It is also important to note that an infertile soil will affect the growth and development of the plant. Having soil tested through the University of Florida Extension every other year is always a good idea. In addition, if there is an issue with water, that is too much or too little, the plant will be unhealthy. Also, weeds compete with desired plants for nutrients, water, and sunlight. Please be aware that nuisance critters such as deer and voles can cause damage to plants. Poor landscape design can affect the growth and performance in a big way; for instance, not putting the right plant at the right place can adversely affect the health and performance of a plant. In addition, landscapers and homeowners alike tend not to consider the mature size of the tree when planting, which results in over-pruning, which subsequently affects the health of the tree. Another major issue that we tend to confuse with insects and disease issues is landscape maintenance or plant care issues. Last but not least; weather and climate can have a negative impact on plant health, especially if maintenance practices are not carried out appropriately. For example, pruning a plant a few weeks before a low temperature; 45 degrees Fahrenheit and under, will cause frost burn to the new shoots.

How can you know if your plant issue is related to insects, diseases, or the environment? A little plant knowledge and experience is needed in order to accurately diagnose plant issues. One general rule to keep in mind is that plant problems that seem too uniform in the landscape are often caused by the environment. For instance, a row of plants in the landscape that all wilted or turned brown, mostly likely is not caused by a disease, but maybe an herbicide or other chemical application in or around the landscape. The presence of a disease mostly shows non-uniform symptoms, that is, the plants will be affected all over the landscape in a non-defined pattern. To get the most accurate diagnosis, you are encouraged to send a specimen of the plant sample to your local UF/IFAS Extension office or if you have tree related issues, hire a Certified Arborist. You can be your own diagnostician if you have the basic knowledge of plants physiology, soils, climate conditions, good insects and diseases identification resources, and a microscope.

For more information on this topic and any other horticulture related topics, contact Grantly Ricketts, a Commercial Horticulture Agent with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at [gricketts@ufl.edu](mailto:gricketts@ufl.edu) or 321-697-3000.