

## Garden Problems

By: Melinda Sperl

In my business, I see insects in almost every size, shape, type and color. It is hard for even the most seasoned landscapers to know what each insect is so it is not surprising that most homeowners have a problem identifying them. We do have some common known insects for our area and normally seen diseases for each time of year depending on the weather.

Recently, while shopping a “big box store”, I witnessed a man pulling leaves out of a plastic bag displaying it to a young man asking what he had on the leaves. I realize that some of these workers have training but this one obviously did not. The leaves had sooty leaf mold which is actually a fungus caused by the excrement of insects which results in a mold. Should you remove the insects the fungus will eventually fade away. The organic method of removal is soap and water while more aggressive methods use systemic insecticide. Unfortunately, this man was not told about either of these products.

When it is very hot we see lot of fungus. This seems contradictory in the heat but the normal cause is overwatering. When the temperatures get hot the tendency is to water more. If the mulch is dry on top and the plant turn yellow and wilt it can be deceiving. Most people turn to water. In reality the mulch retains the water and only is dry on top while one foot down the ground is saturated which is where the roots of the plants are located. Yellow leaves or blades of grass are the most common sign of fungus. Buying a cheap water meter at that store is a good purchase.

Yellow circles in the grass are usually brown patch but it is hard to tell the difference between that and chinch bug damage. If you are not sure it is a good idea not to treat as you can actually feed a fungus by treating for insects.

It is amazing to me though what lengths most will do to find answers to their problems when a true expert is normally just a phone call or email away. You can contact free organizations such as the county locations of County Master Gardeners, or contact us as we will be happy to answer most questions.

Happy Gardening!

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