

Plant Problem Diagnosis

Jan McNeilan

Retired, OSU Extension Agent
And Statewide MG Coordinator

What to Consider?

- The Plant
- The Environment
- Treatments: Water, Fertilization, Chemical

The Plant

- Can You Identify the Plant?
 - Is it a tree or a shrub?
 - Do you know the common or botanical name of the plant? - Common names are misleading!

What Part of the Plant is injured?

- Branch tips
- Top
- Inside
- Whole Plant
- Roots
- Trunk Damage
- When Was Problem First Noticed

The Environment

- Indoors
 - Light
 - Heat Vents
 - Drafts
 - Stoves (wood)
 - Location Recently Moved
- Outdoors
 - Sun
 - Shade
 - Drainage
 - Good
 - Poor
 - Slope
 - What is around the plant - sidewalk, road?

What Do Your Other Plants Look Like?

- Does more than one plant have the same symptoms?
- Which type of plants have the same symptoms?
- Are all plants treated the same?
 - Watering, fertilization, weed control etc.

Are There Insects Present?

- Beneficial Insects
- Insect Pests
- Know the Difference
- Don't spray general insecticides unless you have identified the insect
- Consider alternative controls

What Kind of Insect?

- Boring
 - Powderpost Beetle, , Cane Borer
- Sucking
 - Spider Mite, Aphids
- Biting or Rasping
 - Weevils, Thrips
- Mining
 - Leafminer
- Skeletonizer

What is the History of the Soil

- Compacted
- Herbicide Use
- Heavy Clay
- Poor Drainage
- Root Destruction
- Recent Construction

Weather Patterns

- Excessive Heat
- Excessive Cold
- Hail
- Wind
- Snow or Ice

Other Factors

- Animals
 - Dog
 - Rabbits
 - Mice
 - Gophers or Moles
 - Birds
 - Deer

Trees

- Is it the right size for where it is planted?
- Know correct pruning methods.
- Time pruning correctly.
- What problems are common on specific trees. (see WSU Landscape Pictorial Diagnostic Manual)

Shrubs

- Identify your shrub
- Does it like sun or shade?
- Proper planting techniques.
- Know when to prune.
- Know how to prune.

Perennials

- Does plant require dividing?
- Is plant susceptible to insects or diseases?
- Does it grow best in sun or shade?
- What are it's water requirements?

Annuals

- What zone does it do best in?
 - U.S.D.A. or Sunset?
- Sun or shade
- Water requirements
- Fertilization requirements
- Pruning or pinching?

Containers

- Container mixes
- Watering
- Fertilization
- Will plant over-winter in container?
- Winter protection for containers

Cultural Techniques

- Houseplants or Outside Containers
- Fertilization, Cultivation, Watering, Spraying
- What is Nearby....what is your neighbor doing?
 - Herbicide Drift

Can Anything Be Done Now ?

- Plan your strategy
- Monitor your plants
- Develop a tolerance level
- Take notes.....keep a plant diary
- Don't forget to enjoy your garden!

Have you figured out the problem?

- If you know what the problem is and what can be done about it....that's great!
- If you don't know, you have many resources to help you. Just say, "I don't, but I can find out."
- Enjoy the process!