

CURRENT PLANT PROBLEMS

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One of my roles in Extension is plant diagnostics. In a nutshell, helping people identify plant problems, understand why they occur, and teaching them how to sustainably manage the problem. Here are a few plant problems we are now seeing.

Ornamental pear trees with reddish spots covering their leaves. This is a fungal disease called cedar-hawthorn rust. The fungus requires two hosts to complete its life cycles. Infections go back and forth between cedar trees and ornamental pears. Rarely does it harm cedar trees.

While ornamental pear leaves are almost covered with spots, the disease is more of a nuisance than one that causes long term harm to trees and control is optional. It is too late to apply a fungicide this season. This would be ineffective, a waste of money, and an unnecessary use of a pesticide.

If you choose to try and control cedar-hawthorne rust on ornamental pears, wait until next April and May to apply a fungicide to newly emerging leaves. This is when infections are occurring and the only time fungicides are effective. Myclobutinil is one of the best fungicide to use during spring.

While ornamental pear is no longer recommended for planting because they are overplanted and can be invasive in native areas; when it comes to a similar disease in apples and crabapples, the best means of preventing the disease is to plant resistant cultivars. If this done, fungicides will not be needed.

Cucumber leaves covered with brown or tan spots are infected with a fungal disease. There are a number of different fungi that cause foliar diseases in cucurbits. All have similar symptoms and are managed about the same.

Anthrachnose leaf spots are light brown or reddish and appear near leaf veins. The lesions dry out and dead tissue may fall out, leaving a shot-hole appearance to leaves. Alternaria leaf spots start out as small tan flecks that enlarge and merge together. Larger spots may have concentric rings and appear target-like.

While fungicides applied now will not cure infected leaves, they can reduce new infections to allow the vines to produce longer. If used, select a fungicide that states it is labeled for use on vegetables.

Avoiding overhead irrigation may reduce new infections about as much as a fungicide. To manage cucumber diseases, avoid overhead irrigation or at least water in the mornings for quicker leaf drying. Fungi survive on crop residue in the soil so remove infected plants or till it under for rapid decomposition.

Plant resistant varieties of cucumbers and use crop rotation. Do not plant cucumbers or melons in the same location each year. Ideally, a two or three year rotation should be used which can be challenging in smaller gardens.

I've had leaves of shade trees brought in or pictures of leaves emailed to me that appeared tattered and full of holes. It is assumed an insect is chewing on the leaves. But unless you have a Linden that Japanese beetles might be feeding on, in most cases the cause is wind tatter and is harmless to trees.

We've had windy conditions this year, especially in early June when new leaves were tender. Over summer, trees can develop minor leaf diseases that weaken tissue, making them more likely to be torn by wind or develop holes when leaf spots drop out.

In some cases, trees are affected by herbicide drift which weakens leaf tissue and leads to increased wind tatter. In most cases, even with Japanese beetles on lindens, don't be too concerned about torn or holey shade tree leaves. If you stand back to look at a tree and it still looks fully leafed, otherwise healthy trees will be fine.