Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Our “new Gold” lantana has quit blooming and the leaves look dusty. Is it a fungus? Do lantanas get spider mites? What should we do?

A. The symptoms sound like those caused by lacebugs on lantana. “New Gold” is especially prone to attacks by the sucking insects. The recommended treatment is to cut the lantana back and treat them with acephate or another systemic insecticide. Add some slow release fertilizer and you should have regrowth for a bloom period this fall. Make a note on your calendar for next year to treat with an insecticide 5 to 6 weeks before you saw the symptoms this year. The treatment will prevent the damage next year.

Q. We got over an inch of rain the last week of July. It was amazing, our lawn did not completely green-up but I could definitely see an overall greening. Does that mean that we were not watering enough this last month? I thought the browning was caused by fungus or chinch bugs. We water once per week for about 20 minutes per zone.

A. Yes, I think your diagnosis is correct. Put out some shallow dishes to measure how much water is being applied in 20 minutes. With the temperatures as high as they have been, the lawn probably needed about .75 inches of water to stay green. Your 20 minute application may be about half as much as needed.

You did not say what type of grass you had but if it is zoysia or Bermuda grass another option is to let the grass go dormant until the rains begin this fall. It will greatly reduce the water bill and the lawn will quickly recover.

Q. We visited friends in a neighboring town and noticed that the ball moss was growing on the utility wires! How is that possible? We always try to remove it from our live oaks because it seems to kill the branches by sucking the juices from the stems.

A. Ball moss is an epiphyte which means it makes its living from the air, not from the branches of your live oak. It likes the interior of live oak trees because the humidity is relatively high and the wind is reduced. The branches decline because of shading from the rest of the tree, not from any effect of the ball moss. The ball moss will grow on wires or fences in valleys of towns where the wind and humidity conditions match those of the interior of a live oak tree. Ball moss is not hurting your live oak trees!

Q. We have just planted some Burford hollies as a hedge. We have laid a leaky hose to provide irrigation and will mulch over the hose. What type of mulch do you recommend? We like the look of shredded cedar but a friend said it retards growth.

A. My favorite mulches are live oak leaves, pecan shells, and double cut cedar. All of them will work well in the situation you describe. The cedar is attractive and stays in place better than other mulches during gulley-washer rains. Apply it 3inches thick. It will not retard the growth of your hollies but will reduce soil temperatures, evaporation and weed growth.