

Noticeable Pests

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If you have citrus trees producing fruit in your backyard, you probably experience black specks on the fruit most years. The speckling is not on every fruit, in fact it is usually on a small number of fruits that is on the outside or top of the crown of the plant. The other feature is that the speckling that resembles the expression of a fungal disease, but the specks are usually shallow with no penetration of the fruit. The fruit is unattractive, but the interior is not penetrated.

It turns out that the black speckling is caused by pecking by young grackles on the skins of fruit they can reach from a branch of the tree. It is not been absolutely determined, but observation of the pecking indicates that the birds are using the tiny pieces of citrus peel as a feather treatment of some kind, perhaps for mites. After pecking a tiny piece of peeling the birds lift their heads to the sky with ritualistic movements. If the action is not an effort to apply acidic lemon or satsuma peeling essence to their feathers, perhaps they are eating the pieces, or maybe in fact, it is a prehistoric ritual that protects grackles from evil forces!

The pecking occurs when the fruit is young on the tree (now). It can be prevented by covering the tree with bird netting, but the damage is usually so limited, it is easier just to use the scarred fruit for juice or cooking.

Another unusual pest action is the influx of white flies from the harvest of cotton fields. Before the bolls are collected, the foliage is killed. The management practice is part of the process to keep cotton boll weevils under control, but it also displaces clouds of white flies that end up in area gardens. White flies suck the juices from garden plants such as tomatoes, just like spider mites, and they are almost as difficult to control. The adults can be sprayed off or killed with an insecticide (malathion, spinosad) but in addition to new waves of cotton field refugees, the reproduction time is so short, that eggs and new hatches are soon replacing the last generation.

The best control strategy seems to be an insecticide spray followed by spraying off the adults with a water pressure spray until the waves of white flies quit arriving.

Amid drought and water use restrictions, it is sometimes difficult to tell what the cause of brown areas in your lawn is. If the browning is in the hottest part of the lawn, there is usually one of two causes- either a water deficit or chinch bugs. To determine which issue is causing the browning, start your diagnostic process by generously hand watering a small portion of the edge of the brown area every day for one week. If it is a water distribution problem, the brown area in the special watering area will green up.

The water distribution problem may be caused because your sprinkler system isn't applying enough water to the brown area it could just be a matter of inadequate time, but it also could be an inefficient system. You may have to enlist the help of your irrigation contractor to correct the problem.

If the hand watering does not green up the test area, the problem is often caused by chinch bugs. They are small insects that suck the juices from the grass at the base of the blade. They can often be seen on the grass plant. If it turns out that the browning is caused by chinch bugs it is easy to treat with a soil insecticide. The same soil insecticide is used to control grubs. Follow label instructions.