

## What's Wrong Now?

### *Is a Common Summer Landscape Question*

Summer officially started on June 20, but several local residents started asking the annual summer garden and landscape question “What’s wrong now?” before summer officially began. Local residents who maintain home gardens or landscapes frequently ask this question during the summer season regarding the poor performance or appearance of plants under their care. Our typical summer weather pattern of heat and humidity along with inconsistent rainfall provides sufficient stress to affect the performance and appearance of numerous plants. Add in damage that can be caused by the myriad insect and disease pests that can potentially visit our individual plots of paradise each summer, it’s no wonder folks frequently find something wrong. To add insult to injury, sometimes these conditions occur before summer arrives. This year was no exception.

Remember the cicadas? Sure, you remember, they were here last month. As predicted, they emerged in significant numbers, made lots of noise, and aggravated people trying to mow their lawns. Also as predicted, they didn’t eat plants or bite people or pets. They just followed their ages old pattern of mating, laying eggs in small woody shrub and tree branches and gradually faded away into memory and in preparation to return in 13 years. But one of the “What’s wrong now?” questions people have asked at the Extension office in the past couple of weeks is related to cicada egg laying. The ends of numerous small

branches on trees and shrubs are turning or have turned brown and many have broken and fallen to the ground or are hanging in the plant. This condition is referred to as flagging. Female cicadas laid eggs in these branches by cutting jagged little slits into multiple places and depositing eggs into those slits. Often the ends of those branches will die just past the last egg laying slit and will break off and hang in the canopy before eventually falling out. If you have small limbs falling from trees and shrubs in your lawn, examine them for small jagged slits. If they’re present you can rest easy because the plant isn’t sick nor is it currently under attack; it’s just responding to being used as a cicada egg incubator and is likely going to be fine.



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## FROM THE GROUND UP - What's Wrong Now?

Another pest that prompts the “What’s wrong now?” question is starting to become noticeable in landscapes. I’m referring to bagworms, the foliage eating caterpillars who create cocoons that resemble pine cones and cause significant damage to evergreen trees and shrubs such as arborvitae and junipers each summer. I recommend anyone with evergreen trees and shrubs with needle or scale type foliage in their landscape to scout for bagworms now. Young bagworms are easy to recognize as they create small cocoons that are miniature versions of the adult sized cocoons most people are familiar with. Young bagworms are easy to control with many common insecticides while they’re small and actively eating foliage, but if insecticide applications are delayed until they reach maturity the, liquid sprays can’t penetrate their cocoons.



A third annual summer season pest that’s beginning to appear are webworms. These caterpillars create dirty white web nests on the ends of tree branches and devour the leaves enclosed in their webs. They expand their webs as they grow and develop. Fortunately, webworm damage is mostly cosmetic and doesn’t pose a serious threat to the overall health of trees. Common insecticides available to homeowners are effective against webworms,



but since the damage they cause is minimal, the benefit of using insecticides on them is questionable. Nests that can be reached with loppers or pole pruners can be pruned out and physically destroyed.

If you haven’t seen any of these “What’s wrong now?” pests in your landscape or garden, be thankful for your good fortune. But don’t assume the threat is over as new ones will likely appear soon.

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