



## Garden problems



Dealing with plant problems can be intimidating. Here in Southern Nevada, our low humidity means that we are generally free of diseases, but that does not mean we are problem free. The increase in the local population has brought large changes in the environment. Humidity levels and nighttime temperatures are higher. New plant introductions are accompanied by more diseases, weeds and insect pests.

To repel pathogens and other pests, a plant must be robust. It costs many resources to confront problems, so keeping plants properly fertilized and irrigated is probably the most important way for a gardener to avoid these troubles. It might be likened to a homeowner – if a person has only a few dollars to spend on security, then that person will only be able to afford a small system, perhaps just a door lock. If a person has more financial resources, she or he might be able to afford a whole alarm system, with locks, lights and alarms. Likewise with plants – a plant that is weakened from lack of fertility or water will not have the necessary assets to survive attack by insects or disease organisms.

Our environment is stressful, and few plants can thrive without help in our infertile soil and droughty conditions. Proper soil improvement and irrigation can make all the difference in plant health.

On the other hand, “correct” levels of fertility and moisture means not too much of either. A plant that has received too much nitrogen fertilization can become so tender and succulent that pests will be able to damage it easily. Cacti may become waterlogged with excess irrigation, and be so tender that even a relatively minor pest attack can cause great injury.

One way that the intrepid desert gardener can limit the few, yet difficult, problems that can affect plants, is by basic sanitation. It almost sounds too easy, but it is true. Any leafy material that might have been infected should be cleaned and taken away.

What were the worst garden problems last season? Before planning the new spring garden, make not to put down a welcome mat for those pests.

A difficult task for most gardeners is removing “volunteers.” While we do respect a determined vegetable plant returning from last year’s seeds, they need to be treated as weeds. Otherwise, they can harbor pests that will cause new problems.

Do not plant the same vegetables in the same spot in the garden. “Rotate” the plants – for instance, if the cantaloupe plants were attacked by squash bugs, do not put any members of that family close by. This family includes squash, pumpkins, melons, and cucumbers. If you must



grow them, place them as far as possible from their last location. Similarly, members of the tomato family – peppers, eggplant, and potatoes – should be planted a distance from last year's site. Before planting, improve the soil with compost. This provides a slow-release fertilizer and can even repel disease.

While nothing can guarantee success, cleanliness, nutrition and proper irrigation can make a big difference for the coming season.

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