



## Recognizing some plant problems

There are times when a plant just looks wrong. This can be any kind of plant –that stately tree in the yard, the lettuce in your vegetable plots, or a favorite houseplant.

You may want to call the master gardener help line for information, but if you are not sure what to ask, you cannot get the best assistance. Here are some pointers, before you call.

Examine at the plant and its environment. Is the soil too dry or wet? How often do you irrigate or water? Is it **sitting** in water?



Poor drainage is one of the most common causes of plant death.

Look at the leaves. Little fluffy white masses on the underside of the leaf, or where the leaf is joined to the plant, indicate a particular problem insect. Are leaves the right shape or deformed? If so, look closer. If they are curled or twisted, insects or mites may have set up housekeeping.

Are there holes in the leaves? Are they small, with a yellowish halo

around the edge? That is a frequent symptom of foliar disease.

Are they the right color, or partially discolored? One widespread problem in the desert southwest is alkaline soil, which limits nutrient uptake. The veins in the leaves stay green but the rest becomes pale, even white. Or perhaps the perimeter of the leaves is yellow. This can indicate another deficiency.

Is there a difference in the leaf color between the top of the plant (the newer leaves) and the bottom (older) leaves? That **can** be due to a shortage of some nutrient, but it can **also** mean **poor drainage**.

Look at the overall plant (tree, shrub, or philodendron on your windowsill). Is the problem spread all over, or just in one area? If there is a broken limb, you might be able to prune away the problem.

How **wide and deep** was the hole where that tree or bush was planted? The hole should be **no deeper** than the root ball, but should be **three to five times as wide**.

Some places are too hostile for certain plants. A plant that might survive in a north facing situation can fry under conditions of hot, western light.

Many of our favorite indoor plants originated in the tropics – warm with high humidity. That doesn't come naturally in the desert. They may get scorched if too close to a very sunny window.

How about fertilization? Soils in the desert southwest are notoriously infertile. An all-purpose fertilizer can give plants a boost. It cannot cure diseases or repel insects, but healthy plants are better equipped to deal with problems.

Have you used an herbicide? Has a neighbor? Many pesticide labels give the upper temperature limit for use. Use at higher temperatures, and it may drift off target, doing damage. People occasionally use herbicides when they should use insecticides, with disastrous results.

Plants can look forlorn for many reasons, but looking closely will give you a head start on solving the problems.

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