

## Scouting the landscape



*Grasshopper*

*Sophora Worm*

*Leaf footed bug*

Now is the time for “scouting our home landscapes”, which sounds very serious, and it is. Many of us are gardeners who enjoy looking at all our garden plants, as long as they are not suffering. Scouting means looking for trouble and trouble makers. Even if a garden looks generally passable, closer examination sometimes reveals unpleasant surprises –weeds, insects and even diseases that were not observed before can appear.

Scouting is not a terrible chore, and it does not take the place of enjoying the garden. It is just another way to make sure the landscape is, and remains, healthy. Little troubles that might have been hidden in a flush of growth can be dealt with before they become big problems next season.

Instead of simply admiring the shrubs, trees and vines, look a little closer at each plant’s overall shape, foliage and flowers. Are the leaves intact, or do they show some kind of injury? Damage may mean any one of a whole range of problems.

If leaves are torn, perhaps it is due to mechanical problems with equipment, animals or people. The gardener’s concern is – will the plant survive this injury? Tending to the rest of the issues may be easy, or it may be impossible, depending on the circumstances.

If foliage has holes, they might have been caused by insects – for instance, leafcutter bees will carve perfectly smooth circular shapes at the edges of leaves, notably tougher leaves, like those of the rose family. They are not considered pests, since these bees are important native pollinators.

Tightly curled leaves, on the other hand, are often an indication that aphids have taken up residence. These tiny creatures are pests, and need to be dealt with right away. Not only do these sucking insects weaken a plant, but aphids are also the primary transmitters of plant viruses. Treating an infestation can include using a hard spray of water from a hose, followed by treatments of insecticidal soap and/or Neem oil. This will probably need to be repeated several times, since they reproduce quickly. Their fast reproduction is one reason aphids are poorly controlled by insecticides.

Dark leaf spots, possibly surrounded by a yellow ring, may be symptoms of plant diseases. There are many diseases, with many causes and treatments. No single answer is a cure

all, but diseases can often be prevented by giving plants a little more space for air circulation. Do not crowd plants; while they look sparse at first, they soon fill up available room.

In addition to looking at the desirable plants, searching for the unwanted ones is a worthwhile task. Many annual weeds are now in flower, or soon will be. Removing weeds before they drop their seeds can prevent a big problem from occurring in subsequent years. If the weeds are perennials, then it is important to remove the whole plant and its root system.

At the Cooperative Extension office Master Gardeners can answer many pest questions. There are also fact sheets available (at no cost) addressing these problems.

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