



**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**  
Agriculture and Natural Resources  
UC Master Gardeners of Napa County

## Healthy Garden Tips

napamg.ucanr.edu  
707-253-4221

### TIPS FOR DIAGNOSING PLANT PROBLEMS CAUSED BY INSECTS AND MITES

By C.S. Koehler & Dean Donaldson

1. More than half the problems brought to our attention will be attributable to factors other than insects and mites.
2. The cause of poor plant performance may not be evident on the plant sample presented for diagnosis. The cause may lie further down the plant.
3. The presence of insects or mites does not always mean that those are the real cause of poor plant performance.
4. If the entire plant is dead, the chances are great that insects or mites were not the cause of death. Insects and mites seldom kill their host plant.
5. Most insects and mites show specificity in their choice of plants. Some are general feeders, but the majority are not. Knowing the name of the affected plant is therefore extremely helpful in determining the identity of the offending insect or mite.
6. The application of pesticides may resolve symptoms but seldom addresses the cause of a problem.
7. Insect populations run in cycles. By the time many people notice a pest problem and seek advice, it is often too late that season to take corrective action.
8. Insects and mites must feed in order to survive and reproduce. Evidence of their feeding will nearly always remain on the plant even after the insect/mite is gone. Most signs and symptoms of insect and mite activity fit into one or more of the categories listed below.
9. Symptoms can be categorized according to the type of insect causing the damage. Check UC publications and "Pest Notes" handouts for specific control measures. Management is the same for insects within a category.

#### SYMPTOM OR SIGN

Chewed leaves or other plant parts

Bleached, yellowed, or stippled leaves

Distortion (twisting, cupping, swelling) of plant parts

Dieback of twigs or branches

Presence of excrement, sooty mold, flocculence, froth, or other product

#### PROBABLE INSECT OR MITE CAUSE

Caterpillars, beetles, sawflies (also leafminers, whose chewing is inside the leaf)

Leafhoppers, aphids, psyllids, thrips, mites

Thrips, aphids, blister (bud) mites, gallmakers, psyllids

Borers, scales (also diseases)

Aphids, soft scales, mealybugs, whiteflies  
adelgids, thrips, lacebugs, spittlebugs