OSU Extension can help with plant identification, disease issues

With ample rain across the state, many Oklahoma gardens are flourishing, thanks in part to the moisture, as well as great effort on the part of gardeners. Anyone who has established a garden knows the hard work behind it. So, what do you do when you discover disease in the garden or need help identifying a plant?

Help isn’t far away thanks to the local Oklahoma State University Extension office. Gardeners can locate the county Extension educator here. To provide gardeners with timely and accurate information, there is some information you must be prepared to send in or provide.

If you’re having an issue with a plant, such as yellowing leaves or rust spots, it’s helpful to be able to identify the plant. Many plant problems can be associated with a particular species. This allows Extension professionals to narrow down the problem. Something else they’ll need to know is how long the plant has been planted? If it’s newly planted, the problem likely is due to the way it was planted or the aftercare it received as opposed to a disease.

Have you noticed the same symptoms on other plants in the garden? While disease can spread to different plants, a disease is more likely plant specific. Gather information such as when the problem was first noticed and how long it has been going on. A disease won’t kill a plant immediately but getting a diagnosis soon will help ensure the plant’s survival.

Gardeners who use fertilizer will want to have that product’s information readily available, including what type, how it was applied and how much was applied. The same is true for any pesticides or herbicides that have been used in the garden.

How the plants have been irrigated also is important information. If you have an automated irrigation system, be sure to provide information about how long the system runs, as well as how often. If watering by hand, be sure to make the Extension professional aware of your watering schedule.

Not only is choosing the right plant for your garden situation important, but plant placement is important to get the best results from the plant. Is the plant getting too much/not enough sun/shade? Is the plant under an eave of the home and experiences excess runoff from the rain? Is the plant in an area that is too windy? All these factors play a role in how well the plant performs.

When sending or bringing a sample in for diagnosis, be sure to include portions of the plant that are diseased, as well as portions that are healthy. It’s extremely difficult to identify a problem based on one dead leaf.
Gardeners who are seeking plant identification need to send in a sample that includes leaves, stems, flowers and/or fruit to help simplify identity because many plants have similarly shaped leaves. Flowers are very helpful in identification. Also, provide with the plant sample information such as where it is growing, as this can indicate whether it’s a native plant or a cultivated one.

Other information to include is if it’s a woody shrub, tree, vine, herbaceous perennial, etc. All this information will help us in identifying the plant more quickly.

If pictures are used to help with the diagnosis or ID, be sure the images are clear and in focus. If it is blurry to you, it will be blurry to us. Fuzzy, blurry images are of little worth. There’s no fee for plant identification or internet diagnosis.

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