

Spider mites flourish in hot, dry summer

Staff Reports

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The hot and dry weather seems to encourage the two-spotted spider mite on our oaks, maples and other landscape trees.

Most of us don't ever even see these guys in our gardens, but we're alerted to their presence by their webs that span from leaf to leaf and twig to twig. In the early stages, these webs can be mistaken for the webs of small spiders.

But the mites damage the plant foliage by a piercing-sucking process. The leaf surface collapses around the insertion point. It first becomes yellow (chlorotic) followed by a gray or bronze speckled appearance.

These pests are so small (about 0.4 mm) that it is not easy to see them with the naked eye. However, you can see them contrasted in motion on a sheet of white paper.

While holding a card or sheet of paper under an affected area, vigorously slap the plant surfaces and look closely to see what has dislodged onto the paper. You can use a pencil to circle suspect spots. If the "spots" crawl out of your circles, you probably have a mite problem.

While mites do their damage during the hot, dry summer months, they survive from season to season in the soil or on plant parts. Females can lay up to 20 eggs per day on the leaf surfaces of host plants. A severe infestation can overtake even large plants in short order, destroying the leaves and devastating the plant's vitality, sometimes even killing it.

Mites can infest house plants and small ornamentals, as well as large ones. Adequate irrigation and water form an effective deterrent to heavy infestations. When feasible, a stream of water can sometimes wash populations from the plant. For small jobs, a spray concoction of half water/half rubbing alcohol can also be effective.

Biological controls, such as lacewings and ladybugs, can reduce populations. Overuse of insecticides can sometimes contribute to the spread of mites by wiping out their natural insect predators.

For large plants or heavy infestations, a systemic miticide, such as Talstar, Kelthane or Abamectin, may be necessary.

Certified arborist Fred Morgan of Cordova has owned and operated Morgan Tree Service since 1974. Get more tree information at morgantreeservice.com.



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