

Date: July 15, 2004
Release: Home Gardening
Writer: Tony Melton, County Agent
Florence County

Nothing like Rain to make the Flowers Grow

Most plants look a little happier and gardening is a little easier since we have had a little rain. Most gardeners will tell you that irrigation cannot compare with rainfall when it comes to making plants grow. However, even with the good things, like rain, there can be problems. These sporadic rains have a tendency to cause disease problems. Most disease problems are caused by fungi and most fungi are encouraged by warm, moist conditions. Therefore, under these weather conditions diseases can develop and spread rapidly. So keep an eye out for leafspots on trees, shrubs, and vegetables and treat with a fungicide if needed. Most fungicides are protectants and don't really cure diseases. They just keep diseases from spreading. So spraying at the first signs of a disease is best.

Most of the time we don't recommend spraying before you see a disease: however, some diseases are so devastating preventative sprays are a must. Therefore, spray to prevent leafspot on redbuds and Indian Hawthorn, early blight on tomatoes, and blackspot on roses. Diseases are very difficult to control. A simple mistake in diagnosis, selection of product, and application can result in poor or no control.

First of all, properly diagnose your problem. You need to know your enemy before any war. If you are not a Plant Pathologist, ask questions. A knowledgeable sales staff is an excellent reason to pick a garden center. Your neighbors may have had the same problem or they may be a Master Gardener. You may call our Home & Garden Information Center at 1-888-656-9988 or contact them through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. A Master Gardener or I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu, or 661-4800. To learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby. Also, you may bring a sample of your problem to our office for diagnosis. Bring as large of sample as possible.

Next, get the right product to control your problem. Manufacturers produce and package many different types of fungicides, but you are limited by what the local garden stores have in stock. Many times the same fungicide will be sold under many different brand names. Also, one fungicide may do an excellent job in controlling one disease but perform poorly in controlling another disease. Always read and follow the product label. The label is the LAW. It may be long and complicated but it will contain all types of useful information like diseases controlled, rates, and how to apply the product.

Finally and most importantly, apply the product properly. Always apply sprays in late evenings when it is not going to rain. Most fungicides need to be applied on the top and bottom of all leaves. Thorough coverage is essential for control. In the heat of the day, even water can cause burn on plants. Again read and follow the label.

The Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to people of all ages, regardless of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, disability, political belief, sexual orientation, marital or family status and is an equal opportunity employer.