

Heat, garden pests a challenge in late summer

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

By this time of the year, our yards and gardens generally look a little frayed around the edges. Since late summer is usually a very active time for many garden pests, keep a close watch on all your landscape plants.

The heat stress takes its toll on just about everything, including gardeners themselves. And the last hot days at the end of a long, hot summer are especially hard on landscape plants.

The good news is that this summer is not as warm as last summer and we received some decent rains through the spring and early summer growing seasons. At least that's what I try to remind myself when I labor outside.

Plants experiencing heat stress are weakened, and we often see an increase in disease and insect problems at the end of the summer. So you need to be on the lookout for insect pests such as stinging caterpillars, puss caterpillars, lace bugs, leaf rollers and bagworms.

Stinging caterpillars often are around in the landscape during late summer. The tan, furry asp caterpillar (also known as puss-moth caterpillar), the square-shaped, brightly colored saddleback caterpillar and the green, spiny io moth caterpillar feed on a variety of plants.

Stinging caterpillars produce



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

Cannas make beautiful additions to home and commercial landscapes. They are easy to grow, have few disease problems and produce lush, tropical-looking foliage and showy colorful flowers. However, cannas leafroller caterpillars during late summer.

a very painful burning, itching sting when they touch your skin. The irritation is caused by hollow, venom-filled spines, which puncture the skin and release the venom into the wound. Children should be cautioned against touching any caterpillar.

Stings most commonly occur on hands or arms as gardeners work among their shrubs. Wearing gloves and long sleeves will help prevent stings.

To control these pests, physically destroy as many as you can see (knock them to the ground and step on them). Then spray the plants with Bt (Dipel, Thuricide, Biological Worm Control), Sevin or acephate.

If you grow any types of cannas in your gardens, be on the look out for the canna leaf roller caterpillar. This caterpillar will make a tent for itself by using silk threads to tie up a canna leaf. Living inside the tent, the caterpillar will feed on the leaf. Leaves will become shredded and tattered.

Applications of insecticidal sprays listed above for stinging caterpillars will prove good control of leaf roller caterpillars. It is a very good practice to cut back and destroy the above ground portion of your cannas in the late winter to get rid of any of the unseen leaf roller population.

Lace bugs are another problem this time of year. They are a leading pest on azaleas,



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sycamore and ash trees, and Texas sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) and are active in late summer and fall.

Although there are many types of lace bugs, the damage inflicted on different plants is similar. Damage appears as small, white dots on the upper leaf surfaces — becoming so numerous that the leaf may take on a faded or tan color. Lace bugs have piercing-sucking mouth parts and feed primarily on the underside of the foliage.

Turn a leaf over and look for specks of dark, varnish-like frass (a polite description for insect poop) to confirm lace bug activity. Then, if necessary, control this pest with Ultra-Fine Oil, malathion, acephate or permethrin.

Scale tends to be another major insect pest problem during this time of year. Numerous types of scale also attack a variety of plants. They often go unnoticed, since they do not really look like insects.

Scale insects are covered with a protective shell and do not move once they settle on the plant. They may appear as white, brown or tan dots, dashes or bumps on the foliage or stems of plants, and they detach easily when pushed on with your thumbnail.

Ultra-Fine Oil, malathion, acephate and permethrin are effective in controlling scales but several applications will likely be necessary. Systemic insecticides containing imidacloprid as the active ingredient (such as Bayer Advance Tree & Shrub) will provide longer term control.

Bagworms attack a variety of landscape plants including arborvitae and cypress. Bagworms are easiest to control in late spring and very early summer when they are small. By midsummer, bagworms are much more difficult to control.

Once bagworms become a problem on a given plant or group plants, they are likely to recur yearly. Systemic insecticides containing imidacloprid as the active ingredient (such as Bayer Advance Tree & Shrub) will provide longer term control when applied in early March.

The heat causes enough stress for plants in our landscapes without their having to tolerate insect damage also. So, watch out for these pest problems. Controlling them when necessary will help get your plants through the summer in good shape.

