



*This article is part of a weekly series published in the Batavia Daily News by Jan Beglinger, Agriculture Outreach Coordinator for CCE of Genesee County.*

## **Master Gardener Corner: Master Gardeners are Ready to Help**

*Originally Published: April 28, 2020*

Gardening season will soon be in full swing. As we spend more time in our gardens, so will the birds, bees, ladybugs, toads, snakes, rabbits and many other critters. Some are helpful – we need pollinator and other beneficial insects – and some not so much. Red lily leaf beetles have already been sighted and if you grow bulb lilies you know what that means. Cool, wet weather can lead to an increase in certain diseases. As we start to work in our gardens we also start to notice things that don't look quite right. Did that tree have a split in the trunk last year? Why do the leaves on that plant look funny? Sometimes you just need help figuring out what is going on. That is where your local Cornell Cooperative Extension and Master Gardener Volunteers come in. We can provide you an unbiased source of information using research-based knowledge.



Before attempting to fix a problem in the garden, you need to figure out the cause. It is important to correctly identify the cause before deciding what control measures to take, or if one is even needed. Master Gardeners can help you diagnose plant diseases, ID weeds and insects. They are familiar with many common plant problems and can help you evaluate a garden site. If they don't know the answer, they will research it in order to answer your questions.

Accurate diagnosis requires accurate information about the problem. This is especially true when trying to identify a disease. We need your assistance. It helps to have a detailed description of the symptoms, how they developed and when you noticed the problem. Photos can be helpful for plant and insect identification and other diagnostic questions. Clear, close ups and wide views are helpful depending on the issue. In many cases we will need a sample of the plant to correctly identify the problem.

Plant samples need to be fresh. Keep specimens refrigerated until you can drop them off. A good sample consists of plant materials showing all phases of disease development. It should include plant parts with both healthy and diseased tissue as pathogens are usually found at the boundary between the two. For plants demonstrating systemic symptoms (wilting, yellowing, stunting or general decline) collect the entire plant (when possible), including its carefully dug roots and soil. It is difficult if not impossible to diagnose a disease from dried out dead leaves or branches, but they may be included as part of the sample. Generally, a dead plant tells no tales.

For lawn diseases, submit an 8 x 8 x 6-inch-deep sample taken from where the healthy and diseased turf meet. Enclose specimens in a plastic bag. Never add moisture to your bagged samples.

For trees and shrubs collect several infected branches. Again, it is important for samples to show when symptoms first start. Completely wilted or dead branches are not good for accurate diagnosis, as secondary pathogens or insects may have infected them. If possible put the sample in a sealed plastic bag to retain moisture.

If your plant has symptoms such as yellowing, wilting or dieback you may need to do some digging to get to the root of the problem. Dig, do not pull, the plant from the ground and look at the roots. If roots are dark, discolored and rotten, place them in a plastic bag along with the rest of the plant.

Master Gardeners can also help identify insects (and related arthropods) and provide management suggestions if needed. For insect pest samples, collect the infested part of the plant and place it in a jar, plastic bag, or other container. Collect 1 or more whole insects. Squashed specimens can sometimes be identified. A small piece of damp paper towel can be used to pick up tiny insects. Place the towel inside a sealed bag or container. This is better than using clear tape. If more than one life stage is found (adults and larvae), bring both. Species identification is usually easier with the adult stage. When possible include or identify the plant on which the insect was found, or the location it was found as this may help identify the pest.

For insects found inside the home it is helpful to know what room they were in, approximately how many, the type of damage (if any), and if this has been a recurring problem.

If you have a weed or plant that you need identified, bring in the whole plant if possible. For tree or shrub identification a branch showing the leaf arrangement and buds is the most useful. We can try to ID from a clear photo. For trees, a photo of the whole tree as well as a close up of the bark and leaves can be helpful. Identifying plants from a single leaf, flower, or fruit can be difficult, if not impossible.

Your county Master Gardener Helpline is a good resource to help you solve your garden and landscape problems. Proper diagnosis and identification are essential to managing plant diseases and insect pests. Using the wrong management methods, or treatments applied at the wrong time can be a waste of your time and money.

Have a gardening question? Contact the Cornell Cooperative Extension Genesee County Master Gardeners for assistance. They may be reached via e-mail at: [geneseeemg@hotmail.com](mailto:geneseeemg@hotmail.com). Visit our CCE web site at [genesee.cce.cornell.edu](http://genesee.cce.cornell.edu) or like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/CCEofGenesee](http://www.facebook.com/CCEofGenesee).

During this time, CCE offices are not open, but staff are working remotely and can answer questions via email or phone. At CCE Genesee we now have a spot set up to accept diagnostic samples for the Master Gardener Helpline. A file cabinet has been set up on the back porch at 420 East Main Street. We can also take dried soil samples for pH determination. Please label your sample with your name and contact information. Fill out the green form in the top drawer of the cabinet and attach it to your sample. Email [geneseeemg@hotmail.com](mailto:geneseeemg@hotmail.com) or call 343-3040 x132 to let us know you have dropped off a sample. We will process it as quickly as we can.

## Cornell Cooperative Extension Genesee County

*“CCE of Genesee County is an employer and educator recognized for valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.”*