

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

Gardeners should be on watch for signs of damage by insect pests known as thrips which can readily be seen on light-colored roses as brownish discolorations of the petals.

Question: Most of the blossoms on my roses have developed brown-colored edges and many of the blossoms fail to open properly. What caused this and what should I do to prevent it?

Answer: Your rose blossoms are being damaged by insect pests known as thrips. Thrips are tiny, winged insects about 1/20 inch long. The length of the life cycle (time period

from egg to the adult stage) of thrips depends on temperature. During warm weather conditions, the life cycle takes about 12 days; in cooler weather, the cycle can take as long as 44 days. Thrips affect the buds and blossoms of roses and several other flowers. These flying insects usually are found inside the bloom near the base of the petals and, on

bright warm days, swarms of the adult stage may be seen in flight. Although thrips prefer light-colored blossoms, such as yellow and white, they can also be a problem on dark-colored rose blossoms. Their damage can readily be seen on light-colored roses as brownish discolorations of the petals. Rose buds infested with thrips may not



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open at all, may only partially open or may fully open but appear disfigured. Under severe infestations, buds may simply wither and die before opening. Flecked or scratched petals are also a sign of damage by thrips. The rasping mouth parts of thrips cause this injury when they scratch the petal surface to feed.

Here's a simple technique for checking for thrips. Cut off two or three blossoms displaying insect damage (insect population will decline as a rose blossom matures, so select young blossoms). Sharply tap a blossom several times on a white sheet of paper. If you see small slivers of cream, yellow, or brown "specks" scurrying about headed for cover, then your rose blossoms are infested with thrips. Recommended controls include application of an insecticide containing acephate, bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, esfenvalerate or permethrin. Repeat applications may be necessary. Since species of thrips that attack roses generally do not harm foliage, insecticide applications can concentrate on buds and new growth, rather than the whole bush. One additional recommendation to help manage thrips when only a few blossoms are affected or you only have one or two rose plants: before application of an insecticide, it would be worthwhile to collect damaged blossoms in a plastic bag, seal the

bag and dispose through household garbage collection.

Question: The bark on my crapemyrtles is peeling off and it looks like it has been shredded and just hangs off the trunk and some of the lower branches. Is this normal?

Answer: As crapemyrtles age, the bark will begin to peel off. The horticultural term for this is exfoliating. This is normal and there is no cause for alarm. After the gray bark peels away, you may notice a different shade of underbark. Some of the newer varieties have colors that are cinnamon to dark brown in color. This colorful underbark adds to the beauty of a crapemyrtle especially in the winter. Go ahead and peel any loose bark off once it starts shedding to hasten the exposure of the underbark.

Question: Why are there a lot of small holes in the leaves of my eggplant plants?

Answer: This damage is caused by insects known as flea beetles. Row covers will provide some protection. Sevin insecticide can be used, but do not apply within one day of harvest.

Question: When should I harvest my Irish potatoes?

Answer: New potatoes can be harvested as soon as they reach a suitable size. Fully-developed potatoes for storage can be harvested when the top growth turns yellow. Do not harvest potatoes when the soil is very wet.

This will increase the chance of rotting.

Question: I have noticed that a lot of professional landscapers mulch trees with shredded pine bark mulch in a cone formation around the base of trees. Is this a good idea?

Answer: Mulching around trees is recommended especially given our current dry weather conditions. Mulching materials that come into contact with the tree trunk can severely weaken or even kill the tree. The constant moist conditions created by the mulch will rot the bark layer and damage the cambium (growth) layer of the tree. It is recommended that mulch about four inches deep be spread around the tree but kept a few inches away from the tree trunk. The rule of thumb is to build donuts, not pyramids, around trees.

Question: Will pines needles used as a mulch help lower the soil pH?

Answer: It is true that pine needles help create an acidic soil in native forests after hundreds or even thousands of years of growth and decomposition. But in a home landscape there is not enough