

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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April 27, 2011

Plant Disease Prevention

The best time to prevent or minimize plant disease problems in your yard or garden is before they occur. As we begin another growing season, there are steps that can be taken to reduce disease problems. The following tips will help improve the likelihood of healthy plants.

The first step is to match the plant to the sight. The following questions should help provide the answer: Are the conditions suitable for the plant? Is there adequate space for the plant to grow over time? Is there enough light? Is the soil suitable? Understanding the needs of your plant before planting will help to avoid health problems later.

Once you have answered those questions, you will want to select healthy plants. To determine if a plant is healthy, take a close look at the leaves, stems and roots (if possible). Be wary if you notice wilting, stunting or spots on the leaves and stems or soft, discolored roots. You do need to know what's normal for a particular plant before you can determine its health.

Another way to make sure your yard and garden will not be overrun with diseases is to use a number of different plant species. Many of the problem-causing pathogens attack groups of related plants. Also look for disease-resistant cultivars. A disease resistant cultivar has the ability to resist certain diseases. If you have had a problem with a particular disease, check whether resistant cultivars are available.

Proper spacing for plants is critical to preventing disease problems. Allowing good airflow between plants will help reduce the risk of diseases. Many of the fungi that cause leaf spot problems on plants thrive on conditions of high humidity and long periods of leaf wetness. The label or seed packet should provide proper spacing information.

Keep in mind that fungal diseases thrive in moist conditions. To prevent fungi from growing, reduce the amount of time water is on the leaves by watering in the morning. The water will evaporate off the leaves more quickly than if you water late in the day. If possible, water at ground level. As a general rule, deep and infrequent watering is best for established plants.

Removing diseased leaves, stems, branches, roots, and fruit is an important way to stop problems from spreading to neighboring plants. Wind and rain can help move diseases around, but pathogens also can be spread as you work in the garden. Therefore, clean gardening tools after working with diseased plants to avoid spreading disease to healthy ones. It is also a good idea to remove diseased plant tissue in dry weather only. When cutting out a diseased portion of a plant, cut back into the healthy tissue to make sure you remove the entire problem area.

These pointers are from an article written by former ISU Extension Plant Pathologist, Paula Flynn. For more information on preventing plant disease problems, call the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.