



---

# ASK A MASTER GARDENER

---

## OAK GALL WASPS AND MITES

By Elaine Applebaum, Placer County Master Gardener

**Q** The leaves of my oak tree have red spots on them. Is this a problem?

**A** The spots are most likely caused by erineum mites or gall wasps, both of which cause only cosmetic damage and will not harm your oak tree.

The red spots you see are a reaction by the oak leaf to chemicals secreted by the mite or wasp, similar to how your skin swells when bitten by a mosquito.

Erineum mites cause blister-like swellings on the upper surface of the leaf. On the bottom of the leaf under each swelling is a depression filled with mats of red or rusty brown hairs called erineum. The mites, which cannot be seen without magnification, feed and reproduce inside the blister, protected from the elements and predators.

Galls are distorted swellings of various plant tissues, from twigs and branches to flowers and leaves. They are caused by the chemical secretions of certain moths, midge flies or, as is most likely in this case, gall wasps. Galls grow in a fascinating variety of sizes, shapes and forms, from large "oak apples" to bright pink spiny urchin galls to the red spots you describe.

Almost all of our native oaks play host to one or more of the over 100 species of gall wasps. These are tiny harmless insects, not the large stinging wasps most people think of. The adult is usually under 4 mm long. The female deposits an egg in the plant tissue. As the larvae hatch and begin feeding, the gall grows around them. Since erineum mites and gall wasps do not seriously damage oaks, no management is necessary.

To have your red spots positively identified, you may bring some affected leaves in a plastic bag to the Master Gardener office at 11477 E Avenue (Building 306) at the De Witt Center in Auburn.

### Sources:

*A Field Guide to Insects and Pathogens of California Oaks*, Tedmund J. Swiecki and Elizabeth A. Bernhardt, U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2006.

*Pests of Landscape Trees and Shrubs*, Steve H. Dreistadt, Jack Kelly Clark and Mary Louise Flint, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources pub. 3359. 2004.

---

## UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



### PLACER COUNTY

11477 E Avenue  
Auburn, CA 95603  
(530) 889-7385

E-Mail: [ceplacer@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ceplacer@ucdavis.edu)

The University of California, in accordance with applicable Federal and State law and University policy, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, medical condition (cancer-related), ancestry, marital status, citizenship, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran or special disabled veteran. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, California 94607-5200. (510) 987-0096. United States Department of Agriculture, University of California, Placer & Nevada Counties cooperating.

### NEVADA COUNTY

255 So Auburn  
Grass Valley, CA 95945  
(530) 273-4563

E-Mail: [cenevada@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cenevada@ucdavis.edu)