



Hot Topics

News for Placer County Home Gardeners

This newsletter highlights the latest most-frequently-asked questions coming in to the Hotline, the Master Gardeners' of Placer County help desk.

The Hotline receives over 500 inquiries a year from gardeners looking for help with their gardening problems, and there are often trends in what gardeners want to know or share.

If you have questions or want to share what's happening in your garden, call us at (530) 889-7388 or visit our website at http://pcmg.ucanr.org/Got_Questions/ to find out how you can email your question or bring in a sample.

What's wrong with my blue oak? The leaves have turned grey and are falling even though it's spring.

The Placer County Master Gardener hotline has received over a dozen calls this spring from gardeners who are worried about the white powdery leaves on their blue oak trees. Others have reported heavy leaf drop on both deciduous and live oaks.

A timely post on the website Oak Conservation, Information from the University of California on Oak Wood lands, has the answer...



The cause, according to Doug McCreary of the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program at UC Berkeley, is powdery mildew. "Powdery mildew doesn't need rainfall, but it is favored by warm conditions, high humidity and low light and it loves young, succulent foliage," McCreary said.

"Because California was blessed with above average rainfall this past spring, there has been – and continues to be – considerably more moisture in the soil. Under these conditions, oak trees will grow a 'second flush' of leaves, usually in May or early June, that is very susceptible to powdery mildew."

"Powdery mildew makes it more difficult for the affected leaves to photosynthesize and produce food, and if it's severe enough, it can also result in the leaves distorting, curling up, dying and falling to the ground," McCreary said. "But most affected trees will simply grow a new crop of leaves later in the summer or the following spring. And if weather conditions return to a more normal pattern next year, with little or no rainfall after March, it is unlikely that powdery mildew would continue to be severe or widespread."

UC Master Gardeners of Placer County are University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) ambassadors to the Placer County home gardening community. Master Gardeners promote environmental awareness and sustainable landscape practices, and extend research-based gardening and composting information to the public through educational outreach. UCCE is part of the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) of the University of California. UCCE Placer County: 11477 E Avenue, Auburn, CA 95603, (530) 889-7385

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Above all, McCreary said, don't panic and cut down the trees, even if all their leaves fall off. "The trees are still very much alive," McCreary said. "Losing their foliage is just the oak's way of dealing with an unwanted pest. By this time next year they should again be leafed out without that silver covering currently observable."

To read the complete article, "Powdery Mildew Prevalent on Foothill Oaks This Year," go to

<http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=5218>