

Plant Health

January Edition

The time has never been better to start thinking about how to better care for the world's plants as the United Nations has declared this upcoming year the International Year of Plant Health. USDA is providing resources and promoting events to "... raise global awareness on how protecting plant health can help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost economic development" (USDA).

In addition to the tips below, learn more about the initiative and how to help in 2020 at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/planthealth/iyp/iyp2020>.

Why is Plant Health Important?

Crops and trees are vital providing environments, purifying the air, producing food, and preventing heat deserts in urban areas. However, keeping them healthy is becoming an increasing challenge in a world full of pollutants and pesticides. Understanding the threats to their health and how to help can aid in giving plants the boost they need to accomplish all of the above functions.

Factors Which Negatively Affect Plant Health

The following are some of the many factors that can cause plants to be unhealthy:

- Poor Soil Quality
- Too Much/Too Little Fertilizer
- Suboptimal Temperature
- Inadequate Light
- Pests
- Pesticides/Herbicides

Produced by the Utility Arborist Association Task Force
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Works Cited

"Do You Really Need to Use a Pesticide?" EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, 23 May 2017, www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/do-you-really-need-use-pesticide.

"National Institute of Food and Agriculture." Plant Health | National Institute of Food and Agriculture, nifa.usda.gov/topic/plant-health.



How to Help with General Plant Health

There are a few basic steps you can take to help plants at large, including the following:

Avoiding Imports

Flying from Hawaii to the U.S. mainland, driving across state borders, and international travel pose issues when it comes to avoiding carrying invasives. Invasive pests can spread from plant to plant and compromise plant health. Check your car to make sure there are no invasive pests when driving across state borders and “Always declare any plant material brought in from travel abroad” (USDA).

If you are drawn to the outdoors for camping, hiking, or fishing, be sure to take special care with outdoor equipment. Invasive species can tag along on boots, animals, and gear. It is also prevalent on firewood, and therefore it should never be transported. Get local firewood instead to avoid pest hitchhikers.

Herbicides/Pesticides

While helpful when used properly, the use of herbicides and pesticides can introduce toxins into the environment which can stem plant growth. In many cases, there are other options that should be exercised first before resorting to these methods.

For pest control, an easy way to prevent an infestation is to deny them food and water. Properly disposing of trash regularly, storing food in containers, and fixing water leaks can deprive pests of the resources they need to survive. Similarly, maintaining a healthy lawn can help mitigate the need for herbicides. A strong lawn can “minimize weeds from taking root”; you can achieve a healthy lawn through fertilizing, aerating, and watering (EPA).

Plant Health on Your Property

You can do simple things to improve the health of plants on your property, and this has the added effect of making them more resilient to pests. Expand the mulch ring around your tree, address compacted soil, and water your trees and plants when they are dry. Inspecting the leaves, bark, and trunk regularly can help you spot and treat pest and disease issues early.

Removing invasive plants on your property is another way to help the greater environment. It may take a while to remove everything, so, “until you are able to rid your garden of invasive plants, be responsible and remember to remove and destroy seed heads before they can spread. Also, don't share invasives with other gardeners” (USDA). Afterwards, make sure that you are buying your plants at a certified nursery that doesn't carry pest-infested trees.

