

HELPLINE TRIAGE QUESTIONS

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[Helpline-1 2023-02-08 Mary Ann Hatcher \(panopto.com\)](#)

Lawns

Client Concern:

The lawn is full of weeds. It's brown and green. A large area of the lawn is bare. Used Weed N Feed a month ago and it's April.

Questions to Ask Client:

1. Do you know the type of turfgrass? **Bermuda**
2. How long ago was the lawn planted? **Approximately 4 years ago.**
3. Soil test lately? Results and following the recommendations? **We're in the process of getting results back. Sent it in last week.** Turfgrass types have different fertilization requirements.
4. Any other pesticides besides the Weed N Feed? **Last year, used a granular lawn insecticide and sprayed a fungicide twice.**
5. Main portions of lawn in sun or shade? Only problem areas in the shade? **Main part of lawn is in sun, as is the problem area. Has one tree on the front lawn and it's a young redbud.**
6. Watering Schedule? **Yes.** Remind client of the need for 1 inch per week.
7. Compaction of the soil? **Client states that he collected soil very easily from the problem area and doesn't believe there is compaction.**
8. Can you send in pictures. Close ups of the turf, bare areas, and overall view. **Yes.**
The pictures show many weeds, but the lawn is in green up. There is a large area of bare ground. One single tree on the lawn, but not in the problem area. The problem area may be due to compaction. Send the client publications on how to determine amount of top soil and possible hardpan and how to amend the situation. Lawns need 4 to 6 inches of topsoil to allow for root growth.

Research Publications:

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden/home-lawn-maintenance/>

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/SS529> (extension.org)

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden/control-of-spring-dead-spot-and-bermudagrass-decline/>

https://www.aces.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ANR-0371-Control-of-SDS-Bermudagrass_063020L-G.pdf

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/forestry-wildlife/hardpan-may-be-the-culprit-for-your-failing-wildlife-food-plots/>

Diagnosis: Suspected disease or compaction causing the large bare area.

Recommendation: Send client the publication links by email. Suggest that client use a soil probe in the damaged area in several places to determine if there are 4 to 6 inches of top soil. Send the instructions and form for sending samples of thriving lawn with soil and dying lawn with soil to the Plant Pathology Lab. Make a referral to Agent in the Lab.

Publications: (to be sent to Client)

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden/home-lawn-maintenance/>

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/farming/plant-diagnostic-lab-services/>

https://www.aces.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ANR-0089-A_PlantSampleSubmission_032522L-G.pdf

Trees

Client Concern:

Client has a large oak tree on back of property that is dropping leaves prematurely. Looks very brown at the top of the canopy. Wants to save it and other trees as it is a natural area in the backyard.

1. Age of the tree? Approximately. Height of the tree?
2. The oak is approximately 20 years old and is approximately 30 feet tall. The one large tree is kind of separated from the others. The others are smaller, like redbuds and dogwoods. Wants to save the oak as they grew it from a seedling.
3. Identification of the oak? Please describe the size and shape of leaves, upper and underside. When do the leaves start to fall? What does the bark look like?
4. The leaves are shiny and long, about 5 inches long by 2 inches across. The underside of the leaves is kind of fuzzy. The bark is kind of thick, gray, and breaks up into clumps. All except on one side where the bark is cracked and seems to be coming away. The leaves drop all year long and have a bigger drop about February. *Determined that client was describing a Liveoak.*
5. Signs of distress? Bark splitting, sometimes oozing smells funny
6. What is the soil like? Loamy, sandy, clay, poorly drained, well drained?
7. Easily dug up, but seems to have clay in it. When it rains a few days, there is standing water for a while
8. Has a Soil Test ever been done? No. But now that I think about it. We live next to an old cemetery and a couple of months ago, they were using a spreader over the whole cemetery and now the grave areas are starting to have that excess grass die back.
9. Describe the natural area: Additions of mulch? Depth?

10. **Yes. Dead leaves and a few bags of pine mulch.**
11. Have the trees sustained some damage, i.e., sustained hard freeze, drought, construction within the feeder roots area, the addition of several layers of soil, plants, and framing of a bed area near the trunk of the tree?
12. **Well, like you mentioned, there was a drought a few years back and then a hard freeze for about 5 days in the winter. No building or putting any flower beds in.**
13. Supplied water to the dripline during the 8 week period of drought 18 months ago? **No. I thought it would cope and be fine.**
14. Pictures? Ask client for pictures of leaves, upper and lower, any insect activity, any disturbed bark areas, diseased looking, and pictures of the trunk where it meets the soil. ***Pictures indicate the top of the tree is turning brown, with many bare limbs, there is a large crack on one side running lengthwise on the trunk. Other smaller cracks are visible. Some insect activity, but doesn't seem to be the source of the problem. The tree flange appears normal, but some loss of bark in areas.***

Publications for research:

(Search for this: freeze complications with live oaks; problems with live oaks following hard freeze; herbicide damage to trees; wilt and other diseases of oaks in North Carolina; making decisions about saving the tree or sacrificing it; take a wait and see approach?)

<https://agrillife.org/treecarekit/after-the-storm/repairing-storm-damaged-trees/> (ext.org)..... This link is no longer available. Consider this one, [Urban and Community Forestry | CAN MY TREE BE SAVED? TFS \(tamu.edu\)](#)

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/common-disease-pests-of-oak-in-north-carolina> (ext.org)

<https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/content/article.aspx?id=31600> (extension.org)

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/landscaping/herbicide-damage-in-trees/> (aces.edu)

<https://ask2.extension.org/kb/faq.php?id=776083> (ext.org)

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FR400> (ext.org)

Diagnosis: Suspected Oak Wilt in a Liveoak or Herbicide damage or Winter Damage in a Stressed Tree.

Recommendations to Client: Soil and tissue analysis by submitting samples to the Plant Pathology Lab in Auburn because of the suspected diagnosis.

Publications sent to Client:

https://www.aces.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/IPM-1294_SubmittingSamplesPlants2021_101320L-G.pdf

https://www.aces.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ANR-0089-A_PlantSampleSubmission_032522L-G.pdf

(An Extra Scenario)

Insects

Client Concern:

Caterpillars by the hundreds crawling on the patio and up the screen door. This has been going on for a week. She's tired of repeatedly sweeping them off and wants to get rid of them.

1. Consider the time of year that this is occurring. Late summer and fall occurrence on trees is rarely cause for concern since the tree is nearing dormancy.
2. What vegetation is growing close by and is there evidence of any of the caterpillars feeding on it? the lawn, trees, or shrubs?
3. Pictures of the caterpillars. Close-up of insect and on the vegetation. Place a coin, i.e., penny, next to the caterpillar for a size comparison.
4. Where are the caterpillars feeding?
5. Approximately how much damage to the plants, lawn, or trees has occurred?

Try to identify the caterpillar and determine whether it is feeding without destroying the vegetation, before suggesting a pesticide. Many of the caterpillars are short lived feeders which will develop into moths and butterflies later and don't completely defoliate the tree or plant.