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Strategy

▶ TREE

▶ CARE

Plant Health Care

“Plant health care, also called PHC, offers a total health approach to landscape and plant health,” says Peter Gerstenberger, senior advisor with the Tree Care Industry Association. “Your arborist has recognized a potential or actual problem in your landscape that might be best avoided or treated by implementing a PHC treatment program.”

Traditional landscape pest control programs rely on what are called “**cover sprays**.” The pest control sprays offered to the client are based on the company’s knowledge of common pest problems and control measures in the service area. The cover spray type, method, and timing are pre-determined by the company. The homeowner may have the option to choose from a number of pest control programs. Traditional pest control programs are not necessarily obsolete or “bad” for the environment and may be the best option for clients who have overriding concerns about program cost or are only concerned about one specific pest problem.

In contrast, plant health care technicians consider the landscape as a whole when deciding how to best care for plants. PHC technicians control plant problems through careful monitoring of the landscape environment. Chemical controls may be part of the treatment but they are not necessarily used in every treatment. Because of this, every PHC program is “customized” to fit the client’s property and expectations.

The PHC technician maintains landscape plants by:

- ◆ evaluating the landscape’s environment;
- ◆ noting causes of plant stress (stressors);
- ◆ maintaining plant performance through proper cultural practices;
- ◆ investigating the landscape through monitoring.
- ◆ identifying and treating problems as they occur;

The following are examples of some common problems:

- ◆ Many plant problems are related to improper matching of the plant’s requirements to the landscape.
- ◆ Plants may have been improperly planted.
- ◆ Plants may be subjected to improper maintenance techniques.
- ◆ Often a combination of improper plant sighting (wrong plant / wrong site), improper planting and improper maintenance techniques can cause plant stress and decline.

Your expectations

“A PHC technician also will consider your expectations when deciding how to implement a PHC treatment program,” explains Gerstenberger. One important question is just when you, the client, want to resort to chemical control of pest problems. Some clients will tolerate a greater percentage of plant damage before requiring action. Some clients will tolerate very little plant damage. Often a client will tolerate less damage on a prized ornamental specimen tree located in the front yard as opposed to a group of shade trees growing in the back yard.

This requires the PHC technician to apply a higher action threshold to some trees and/or sections of the landscape than others. *“Here, communication and understanding between the client and plant health care technician are key!”* says Gerstenberger. Treatment recommendations are then made to the client based on that client’s expectations. The key to a successful plant health care program is communication between the client and PHC technician.

Homeowners who are looking for someone to assess their landscape and make recommendations should consult an ISA Certified Professional Arborist.

Information provided by the TCIA Reporter. For More Information call 503-744-0914.