

# Tips for submitting photos & Questions to Ask Extension

The following are tips on how to take good photos and send detailed information that will help us understand your question and respond quickly with a confident answer.

## General photography tips

Make sure your photos are clear and in focus.

- Wipe off your cell phone camera lens before taking the photos as it is common for skin oil to accumulate and fog up the picture.
- Take multiple photos and choose the clearest and sharpest one.
- Avoid taking photos with the sun or major light sources in front of you, as your camera will adjust and make your subject dark. Move your camera or the subject so that the light is behind you.
- Take photos from multiple angles.
- In harsh sunlight conditions, shading your subject may provide better lighting and clarity.

## Closeups

Closeups of details can be important.

- With cellphone cameras, move your phone as close to the subject as possible rather than relying heavily on the digital zoom.
- However, once within a foot or so of a small subject, your camera may not be able to focus that close. Consider backing up a bit and enlarging with a small amount of digital zoom if you are having trouble getting focus.

When possible, include an object in the photo with your subject to provide sizing context, such as:

- A ruler (best option)
- Coin
- Pen/pencil
- Battery
- Finger



*Although a ruler may be ideal, common objects can provide a good sense of scale and specimen size.*

## **Provide written context**

In the text area of the Ask Extension submission page, submit information beyond “what is this?” and your photos.

Other clues can help us hone in on your problem or identify your subject.

- Did you or any other people recently do something that might have caused the issue you are asking about? For example: you applied herbicide to something nearby, or a sidewalk was added near a tree in question.
- How long has the issue been going on? Did a weather event recently occur such as rain, lightning, or extended drought?
- Where in the landscape did you find the issue? Is the area lower or higher relative elevation, is it near a water source, is it a high or low-sun area?

# Plant Problems and Plant ID

## Problems

- Take photos of all symptomatic parts of the plant. Inspect all aspects of the plant, not just the area with the first issue you noticed. Inspect the stems, trunk, the ground/soil, and the leaves. Take and send a photo even if you are not sure if it is relevant.



*These longleaf pine trees are infected with pitch canker. Different photos from different distances provide their own clues.*

- Take photos of both the top AND bottom of leaves. Some insects cause damage only visible underneath.



*Whether for the purpose of identifying a plant species or a disease infecting the plant, both the top and bottom surfaces may provide clues.*



## Plant identification

We need to see reproductive parts of the plant (flowers, fruits, seedheads), leaf arrangement (alternate or opposite branching), leaf margins, and buds. Show us both the whole plant and close up views.



*Take a photo of the full plant and a closeup of the leaf. (photo credit: HGIC)*



*Photo of both leaves and buds help us ID the plant. (photo credit HGIC)*

## Grasses and grass-like plant identification

These are challenging to identify, especially if plants have been mowed down. Characteristics that help for ID:

- Flowers/seedheads
- Habit of the plants (clumping, creeping or spreading?)
- Stems (flat, round, or angular in cross section?)
- Hairs present on leaves or stems?

- Leaf arrangement (rolled or folded?)
- Root system (fibrous? Rhizomes or stolons? Bulbs?)

## Insects

- Crumpled insects without an indicator of size makes ID very difficult.
- Photos need to be in good natural light. In focus. Top, bottom, and side views if possible.
- Capture flying or crawling insects in a container and put them in the freezer for 15 minutes to stop their activity and hold them still for a photo.
- Put an object next to the insect (ruler, coin) for size.

## Snake, lizard, amphibian identification

- If possible, take photos of the top and bottom of the animal. Patterns and colorizations help with identification.
- If you are unsure if an animal is safe to handle (the animal may be aggressive or sick), do not touch it.



*Dorsal and ventral coloration and patterns aid Identification of snake species such as the ring-necked snake (top two photos) and Eastern garter snake (bottom two photos).*