



FYN Garden Q & A Series

Thomas Becker
Extension Agent, Florida
Yards & Neighborhoods



FYN Topic: Lichens

Question: Our red maple has a moss-like covering on the trunk and appears to be dying. Are the two connected? Wendell, email

Answer: The covering is not moss but a flaky or feathery organism called lichens. Living on rocks, branches and bark, lichens can be grey, white, black, red, gold or yellow. Covering rocks like moss or coating a trunk of a tree, all types of lichens mutually co-exist on any plant without harm. Consider other possible causes for the maple's poor growth. I suspect root or a transplanting problem.

Lichens are not a pest and no chemical spray legally controls them. Lichens exist everywhere on earth. Most similar to algae, lichens have fungal hyphae, called rhizoids, used to stick itself firmly to a surface. Lichens obtain any minerals needed for survival from rain water, organic debris blowing in the wind, plant parts, bird excrement, etc. Despite their light fuzzy look, lichens live in extreme heat, cold and drought, sun or shade. On rocks, lichens adhere so tightly that they literally make soil by breaking away tiny fragment pieces.



Useful Links

<http://www.floridayards.org>
<http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>
<http://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu>

Lichens Photo credit: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

Thomas Becker is an extension agent for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program at the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the Horticulture Help Desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:p.m. or by emailing Extgardener@leegov.com. Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M 9/08/2012.

