



Garden q & a  
STEPHEN BROWN

## Flax Lily Problem

January 25

**Question:** I have an infestation of microscopic insects which might be whiteflies that are doing tremendous damage to some of my plants including flax lily, 'Tiger Eye' duranta, and poinsettia. The insects attached themselves to the underside of the plants and, while eating through the plants, cause great discoloration and spotting on the top side of the leaves. I've tried spraying with systemic insect killer with no luck as it is almost impossible to get it on the underside of the leaves. Can you recommend a solution to eliminate these insects?

- Thomas G, e-mail



**Answer:** Even though whiteflies are very small, they are not microscopic. Entomologists use the term microscopic for insects that cannot be seen with the naked eyes. Adult whiteflies and even the older molts can be distinguished without the use of a microscope or hand lens. Furthermore whiteflies do not chew, but suck the sap of plants for their sustenance. Small sap sucking insects do not leave holes in leaves. Whiteflies can cause chlorotic spots but these spots will first appear on the underside of the leaves. Therefore, the spotting on the top of the leaves may be caused by *Alternaria* or another fungus or perhaps by a bacterium. Treating a disease problem with an insecticide will not resolve your dilemma. Why not bring in samples of the affected plant parts to our office for inspection? We should be able to determine whether the spots are fungal or insect caused and recommend the proper treatment.

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 461-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing [brownsh@leegov.com](mailto:brownsh@leegov.com). Visit his web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml> "Garden Doctor" video clips <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/Video.shtml> and flowering trees information at [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA\\_Z.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml)



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## Flax Lily and False Oleander Scales

February 2

**Question:** Last week, Thomas G. was concerned that whiteflies were attacking his flax lily and other plants. Here is an edited version of his question. "I have an infestation of microscopic insects which might be whiteflies that are doing tremendous damage to some of my plants including flax lily. The insects attached themselves to the underside of the plants and cause great discoloration and spotting on the top side of the leaves. I've tried spraying with systemic insect killer, but with no luck." As advised, Thomas brought in several leaves of the flax lily for our inspection.

- Thomas G, e-mail



**Answer:** The yellowing is due to an insect feeding on the underside of the leaves. However, the insect is the false oleander scale and not whiteflies. Both insects are easy to identify. Adult whiteflies are white; they look like miniature flies, and take flight when disturbed. The false oleander scales are also white but with a black spot on the narrow ends of their bodies. They are permanently attached to the underside of the leaves and cannot move even when sprayed upon. The false oleander scale feeds by sucking sap from the plant. The sap contains green chlorophyll. When the sap is removed, the area becomes yellow. The affected leaves cannot repair themselves. Only the emergence of new, unaffected leaves will eventually give the plant the appearance you want. Your systemic insecticidal treatment did work. The scales are dead to the touch. For more information on the scale, go to my web site, then click on "Brown's Plant File" and scroll to flax lily.

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