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## In Your Garden: New threat to ficus hedges

By Joel Crippen

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**Question:** My ficus hedge seems to be covered with a type of whitefly which is killing large patches of the hedge. What can I do?

**Answer:** The fig whitefly is a very recent invader to Florida and has the potential to decimate our ubiquitous ficus hedges. So far, it attacks only fig species (*Ficus* sp.), but this includes the most used hedging plant in all of South Florida, *Ficus benjamina*. It also affects Cuban laurel fig (*Ficus microcarpa*), which is a popular hedge material in Palm Beach. Tree hosts include fiddle-leaf fig (*Ficus lyrata*), the banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) and our native strangler fig (*Ficus aurea*).



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You know you have an infestation if you see swarms of white gnat-like insects, rapid yellowing of leaves and then defoliation (loss of leaves) of the hedge. If left untreated, not only will it aid in the spread of the insects but it may lead to the death of your hedge or tree.

Here's what you can do: Spray your plants with an foliar oil spray such as Volck or Summit brands. If you take the organic route, use Safer's Insecticidal Soap or Organocide.

You must also use a systemic insecticide as a root drench. Spectricide Systemic Tree & Shrub Insect Control, Bayer Advanced Tree & Shrub Insect Control or Ortho Systemic Insect Killer are all readily available. (Follow directions carefully.) If you use a landscape maintenance service, alert them. This infestation is so recent, many of them may not be aware of this potentially serious problem.

**Question:** We love our plumbago plants with their lacy foliage and bright blue flowers, but just recently, the plants have defoliated and appear near death. What's going on?

**Answer:** Cape plumbago (*Plumbago capensis*) can be a beautiful, nearly everblooming shrub. It is native to arid South Africa, so it tends to suffer a little during our humid summers, especially with the amount of rain we have received.

To help your plants recover, make sure they aren't getting any irrigation except rain. Keep them as dry as possible. Clean out the dead material and consider spraying with a foliar fungicide.


Come fall, when the dry season starts, the plants should spring back and become beautiful again. Then, before next summer, prune them back and clean them out so they're smaller when we go into the rainy season.

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