

Farm Life Guidelines for Requesting Help

Our Goal

We receive many requests for help with plant problems, here at Farm Life, that come in a variety of formats and with varying degrees of information. Our goal is to provide our customers with the most accurate diagnosis possible. This goal is made difficult since we are separated from the problem in both distance and time, and since the request is usually sent through multiple people. In an effort to help us provide an accurate response, we have created a guideline for asking for help.

Diagnosing Problems

First, a word about diagnosing plant problems. It is extremely difficult. In rare cases it is possible to look at a poorly performing plant and say with certainty, "There is the problem." It can be done when looking at heavy infestations of scale, mealy bugs or mites. Remove these insects and the problem should be solved. However, strange new growth, burnt tips or edges, spots developing, poor color and loss of older foliage are the maladies that typically have an elusive cause. The best way to make a diagnosis involves an examination of the plant, the plant's history, and the environment. This is the part we miss out on with only a photo of the symptoms. It is not the case, that each type of malady expresses itself in a consistent and predictable way. A trained eye may be able to diagnose the cause of a problem by looking at the symptoms, but only when that trained eye also knows the recent history of the plant. For example, the loss of 50% of the living roots will manifest differently in the canopy of a Ficus compared to a Mass Cane. A Ficus would start to drop older leaves, while a Mass Cane would take on a dull stagnant appearance and start to produce thin strappy leaves. Also, within the same plant, necrotic leaf tissue could be due to inadequate light, loss of roots, or disease. For the difficult to diagnose problem, a history and an exam are required as well as a few photos.

Our Expectations

This part mainly deals with problems seen within the first couple of months after receiving Farm Life Plants. We stand behind our plants 100%. If your company has a problem with one of our plants, our first thought is what did we do wrong? The purpose of this questionnaire is not to assign blame to someone other than us, instead we are genuinely interested in what the potential cause of the problems are so that we may better prepare our plants to handle those same circumstances in the future. That being said, we are not selling factory made plastic widgets. These are living things that are experiencing the most traumatic experience of their existence as they travel from us to you. We expect that the receiving environment has been set up to act like a triage unit for living things that need to be pampered while they recuperate from the shipping experience. Anyone shipping a puppy across the country would expect a certain level of care on the receiving end to ensure the shipping process was successful. If a plant does not do well after shipping, the problem may be something we did, a problem in transit, something you did or a combination of things. The closer we can get to the actual cause the faster we can eliminate that type of problem in the future. We also expect that you are genuinely interested in solving this problem, and are not just looking for a way to blame the grower to receive a credit. That is very short term thinking.

Problem Solving

The 4 things we need to provide a good diagnosis and recommendation are:

1. The results of a quick examination of the plant.
2. Some information about the history of the plant and it's environment.
3. A few photos showing the problem in different ways.
4. From the person that is directly working with the plant, a guess as to what they think the possible cause may be.

Use the questionnaire to provide 1, 2, and 4. Send pictures using these guidelines:

Guidelines for Pictures:

A close-up of a leaf is helpful to see the exact manifestation of the problem. A picture that shows the entire plant is helpful since whole categories of problems may be eliminated if the problem is confined to a specific portion of the plant. Picture 3 can change depending on the nature of the issue. In some cases a picture showing the plant's environment may be appropriate and in other cases a group picture of many damaged plants might be better. These three photos will provide us with a good idea of what is going on.



Examination Guidelines

1. Look for insects, specifically mites, infecting the plant. I say specifically mites, because these can be more difficult to spot than other insects. That being said, check in common hiding places for mealy bugs as well. Some favorite mealybug spots are inside or wrapped up in new foliage, or hidden in a space at a node, where a branch meets the stem.
2. Remove the pot if possible and check the root environment. Look for dark brown or black roots, very waterlogged conditions, root growth blocking drainage holes, bottom of pot sitting in water or anything else that doesn't look right. If removing the pot is not possible, use a soil probe to extract some soil from the bottom 25% of the container. Try to gage the health of the root environment.
3. Assess the plant from a distance. Is this problem effecting only older growth, only newer growth, entire plant, the side away from the light source or the side facing a door or window? Is there any hint of shiny new growth, or is there no new growth? Does the plant, as a whole, look healthy or does it have a dull stagnant appearance?
4. If leaves are falling, are they turning yellow first then falling, or are they falling while green?
5. Are there any environmental factors that may be the cause? Look for causes in A/C patterns, overhead lights out, a hot window, next to an exterior door, in a high traffic area, in a dark corner. Do you know the real temperatures that the plant experiences at night or on the weekends? Does the owner turn the A/C up or down on the weekends?

Questionnaire:

1. What are the conditions of the root environment? Check any that apply.

Too Wet Too Dry Healthy Roots Dead Roots Pot Problems

Notes:

2. Are there any visible insects?

Mealybugs Mites Scale Aphids Thrips

3. Is there a pattern to the symptoms on the plant?

New Leaves Old Leaves Leaves in Least Light Most exposed leaves

Notes:

4. Aside from the directly damaged parts of the plant, what is the overall appearance of plant?

Has New Growth Dull Appearance Wilted Lacking Nutrients Appears Healthy

Notes:

5. How long has the plant been on the job?

6. If plant is on the job more than six months, describe the fertilizer it has received.

7. If the plant has been on the job for less than six month, describe the lighting situation.

8. Describe anything noteworthy in the history of the plant. Basically, describe any issue that you feel might have had an effect on the health of the plant. Focus mainly on the 4 months or less prior to the problem.

If plant on job less than 1 month:

A. Describe the nature of the problem:

Noticed Immediately Developed over 2 weeks Plants nice for about 2 weeks then a crash

B. Is there a high degree of mechanical damage, as if damaged during shipping? Was the truck delayed or was there a delay in unsleeving of the plants?

C. What is the receiving facility like? Daytime and nighttime temperatures inside would be helpful.

D. Describe the process for receiving plants and preparing plants to transport to a job site. Are there drenches or sprays that are applied? Are the plants re-sleeved for transport?