

Got a sick plant? See Penn State

UNIVERSITY PARK — If sick plants had brains and could get around on their own, they would probably head for the Penn State campus. Penn State, you see, has a plant disease clinic that is the only one of its kind in the Commonwealth — and the services are free.

Clinic facilities include a laboratory for microscopic examination of diseased plants. The lab can also isolate and grow plant pathogens (disease organisms). The clinic is also equipped to diagnose plant problems caused by fungi, bacteria, nematodes, viruses, and air

pollutants.

Available to anyone with plant problems, the clinic operates within the Department of Plant Pathology, College of Agriculture. It complements the regular soil and foliage testing laboratories. Managing the facility is John D. Peplinski.

Peplinski and associates examine plants for symptoms of damage. Once causes are determined, controls are recommended whenever possible. The staff includes all Extension Service specialists in the Department of Plant Pathology.

If the plant pathology staff finds that diseases and air pollutants are not involved in a problem, then extension specialists are consulted in other departments — entomology, agronomy, horticulture, or forestry. The Penn Staters also cooperate with several other university clinics in the Northeast to help understand and solve plant

problems.

Peplinski stresses, however, that the keys to solving plant problems are good samples and complete background information. Therefore, persons are strongly encouraged to use Plant Disease Clinic kits to send in samples. The kits are free, and can easily be obtained at any County Extension Office or directly from the Plant Disease Clinic, 218 Buckhout Laboratory, University Park, PA 16802. The kits contain instructions for preparing and mailing samples to the clinic.

The clinic receives specimens from commercial operators and homeowners alike. About 2,000 specimens are processed by the clinic each year. A computer information system is used in the clinic to store and retrieve the

information on total specimens received, and other information about individual samples.

"Listings of specimen records can be produced," Peplinski said, "whenever people request information regarding certain diseases or crops. For example, if a listing is needed for all tomato samples received by the clinic, we can print this list with our computer terminal."

Killer Bees

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isolated apiaries, and using new management methods that require less contact with the insects. Beekeepers must also start selecting for milder characteristics by eliminating colonies that are especially aggressive. Convincing them to do so will be difficult, because with honey production down, beekeepers are reluctant to eliminate any of their bees.

Many questions remain

regarding the Africanized bee. Caron is collaborating with faculty members at the University of Panama to learn more about why the Africanized bees are so aggressive. To what stimuli do they react? How can dangerous situations be avoided? And how can their genetics be changed to make them more like the northern European bees we're used to? These are questions we hope will be answered soon, for the Panamanians' sake and for our own.



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