

## **Evergreen trees dropping leaves**

Many evergreen plants shed their older leaves as new leaves come on in spring. But this natural process creates much concern from homeowners in North Florida.

Some of the common evergreen plants that drop their older leaves as the new growth develops include Southern magnolias, azaleas, gardenias, some types of holly and certain species of evergreen and semi-evergreen trees.

Many of the older, mature leaves on southern magnolias will turn yellow and begin dropping as new foliage emerges in the spring. This is normal and there is no need for concern.

In spring as the temperatures warm and day length becomes longer, these plants begin producing new leaves. These new, young leaves use much of the available water and nutrients and the older leaves turn yellow and start falling to the ground. This period of leaf-drop can continue for several weeks or longer. If the plants are stressed from dry weather, construction damage, lawn herbicides, etc., a considerable number of leaves may fall. But, as long as the new growth looks healthy, the plants will be okay.

I have seen magnolia trees in landscapes and in the wild that looked as if they were about to “bite the dust” during this shedding process. There is a rebalancing going on in these plants during the spring and early summer. The tree cannot support all the additional new leaves and the older leaves too. As the new growth slows and a sufficient amount of older leaves have fallen, the top of the plant is again in balance with its root system.

Until this balance is reached, the plant can wilt and shed leaves to the point where you believe it is about to die. Good water management is the best thing to provide a plant during this rebalancing phase. Too much nitrogen fertilizer can force the plant to produce more leaves than it can support, further stressing the plant.

Leaf-drop in the magnolia is very noticeable because magnolias are fairly common and because their leaves are large in size. But some homeowners also become concerned about laurel oaks (which are shedding many leaves now), gardenias, azaleas and a number of other evergreen plants.

There is no need to be alarmed when you see this happen as long as you also see new, healthy leaves being produced. Some years the total number of leaves falling may be more pronounced compared to other years. This may have to do with many environmental factors such as drought, heat, root injury from construction or herbicides, etc. But again, as long as you see new, healthy leaves and water properly, the plants will be okay.

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