Tiny insect results in faulty flowers

Q. My rose bush was doing great until recently. Now, many of the flowers do not fully open and a good number of the petals have turned off color with some having brown edges. What caused this?

A. From your description, I'd suspect flower thrips. Flower thrips are tiny insects. As their name implies, they feed on flowers. They’re yellow with some brown blotching. They’re slender and range from 1/16 to 1/8 inch in length. Thrips attack many flowering plants, including roses. Their feeding results in discolored flowers that fail to fully open or that are deformed.

To check for thrips, shake or tap the flowers over a white piece of paper. The thrips will fall onto the paper and can be more easily seen. Because thrips are subject to quickly being blown off the paper, this procedure is best done in the absence of wind or performed indoors. You can also carefully pull an infested flower apart looking for the tiny thrips moving within the flower. A magnifying glass will help you see them.

A number of insecticides are labeled for controlling thrips including products containing bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, permethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin and imidacloprid. Insecticidal soap is effective as well. Always read and follow the product’s label instructions and precautions when using any pesticide.

Additional information on thrips can be found at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IG013 and http://woodypest.ifas.ufl.edu/thrips.htm.

Q. My St. Augustinegrass lawn was looking good this spring but several spots suddenly turned yellow and then straw brown. This happened in the sunnier areas of my front yard. I have not noticed the problem in the shadier backyard. What could have caused these brown areas so quickly?

A. You’ve done a great job describing chinch bug injury. Chinch bugs are the most common pest of St. Augustinegrass in Florida. As a result, anyone responsible for maintaining a St. Augustine lawn would be wise to learn how to identify this common pest. If you have St. Augustinegrass, it is a matter of time before chinch bugs find your lawn.

To find chinch bugs, part the grass near yellowed areas and look at the soil surface and base of the grass plants. Examine several different areas. Adult chinch bugs are about 1/5 inch long, black with white markings on the back. The immature chinch bugs, which are red, are even smaller. Keep in mind, they are tiny and usually are quickly moving along the soil, thatch and lawngrass. So look close.

A number of lawn insecticides are labeled for controlling chinch bugs including products containing bifenthrin, deltamethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin and permethrin. Always read and follow the product’s label instructions and precautions when using any pesticide.
Additional information on chinch bugs can be found at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH036.

Larry Williams
Extension Agent, Horticulture
July 18, 2006