Gardeners contacted the Santa Rosa Extension office over eight thousand times during 2003. These phone calls and visits included a wide variety of gardening questions, but most people wanted help in solving plant problems. Following are the three most frequently asked questions.

**Question:** Why is my tree dying?
**Answer:** There is no single answer because trees, as living things, are subject to insects, disease, lightening strikes and other natural causes. However, we are often our trees’ worst enemy. Most sizeable ailing trees that I have examined in urban and suburban areas suffer from root damage.

Any soil disturbance near a tree can have long term effects. Grading, filling and ditching usually results in root loss or the inability of roots to function as before. Heavy equipment traveling over the root zone can also compact the soil and have similar effects.

Saving big trees on small lots is especially challenging because the average root spread is three times the canopy spread, and most roots are within the top twelve inches of soil. There are often not enough roots left once home construction is complete. Even more frustrating is the fact that the tree might live and decline slowly over a one to five year period before finally succumbing to this drastic change to the root system.

Trees in rural settings live about ten times longer than their urban and suburban cousins, so obviously changes during property development have their effects. All possible precautions should be used when property is being developed.

**Question:** I have these dead spots in my lawn. What is causing this?
**Answer:** There are so many possible causes of dead areas in a lawn that each must be diagnosed individually. We find seasonal problems such as insects, disease, drought and flood. But most problems are brought on by the stresses we give the lawn through improper maintenance practices.

In general, home owners who encounter lawn problems have overlooked some basic requirement of that particular kind of grass. Most common mistakes include mowing too low, watering too often once the grass is established, applying too much fertilizer, or trying to grow the grass where there’s too much shade.

**Question:** I am new to the area and am unfamiliar with gardening here. What flowers, shrubs and trees can I grow?
**Answer:** We can grow a wide range of landscape plants, but choose those that are adapted to your specific site in terms of light and moisture preferences, too. There are many sources of local gardening information, including your local UF-IFAS Extension office, garden center, or landscape professional. For quick web access, visit the UF-IFAS Extension website for Leon County at http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu

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