

COASTAL GARDENER
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Q: Please identify the small bugs in this medicine vial.

A: The above was the note attached to the vial plus a phone number. Looking inside the vial revealed a number of tiny dots about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. When disturbed, the dots moved and the sender indicated in a phone conversation that they came from his new house! A 10 x hand lens revealed that the dots are “booklice.” Booklice are found in moist, dark places and usually feed on decaying vegetation. They are so small that – unless you are looking for them – you would not notice them in nature. Unfortunately, they have also found human dwellings to their liking. In a home they are usually found where books are kept, i.e. the library or bookshelf. In libraries booklice can become a major problem as they feed on the starch and glue in book bindings. They will also feed on plant specimens (cellulose) and insects, so can be a problem in dry flower arrangements, herbaria and insect museums. My reference material indicates that booklice are “especially abundant in California.”

Control of booklice will be an ongoing process. Thoroughly vacuum the area where you find booklice. Repeat the thorough cleaning periodically. Check for moisture and make sure the infested area is as dry as possible. Infested books should be fumigated periodically as needed to disinfect them. This can be done with mothballs and a garbage bag. Shelves can be sprayed with a household insecticide to destroy residual populations.

Q: My oleander bush is infested with millions of little yellow bugs. They are on all the new shoots and are making the bush sticky and generally a mess. How do I get rid of this pest?

A: What you have is an infestation of oleander aphids. This pest was introduced into the United States from Europe many years ago and is now well established throughout the south and southwest U.S. Often naturally occurring predators and parasites will keep oleander aphids in check. If, however, you cannot stand the appearance of your oleander bush while the predators and parasites work on the aphid population, you can spray the bush with insecticidal soap or summer oil.

Insecticides containing imidacloprid are also very effective. Use all plant protection products according to label directions for best results.

Q: My cypress trees have several dead limbs present. The limbs die very quickly. Is there anything I can do to save these trees?

A: Without actually examining a dead limb, I cannot make an exact diagnosis. However, on the Central Coast the most common cause of limb and tree death in cypress is “cypress canker.” This disease is caused by a fungus, which attacks twigs and new growth during the spring rainy season. Infections progress into major limbs and at times the trunk. These infections can girdle the infected limb causing death. Pruning to remove diseased limbs and removal of badly diseased trees is the only control presently recommended. I know of no effective or recommended fungicide for control of cypress canker. Most cypress cultivars are susceptible to canker disease but are not all equal in their susceptibility. Cedar species are immune. If you would like a listing of these species and cultivars, contact the Coastal Gardener.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**