

Of Bugs and Blights

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A storm drain is a direct route to local waters: streams, creeks or lakes, Puget Sound or the Columbia River. If you will, stand in a parking lot during a rainstorm and notice how much oil is flowing by your feet to the drain. Grass clippings with attached herbicides blown onto the street with the mower, and sediments with fertilizers or pesticides attached erode and also run downhill to the storm drain. Road pollutants mix with the sediment, yard clippings, and yard contaminants as it travels: drain, to creek, to river, to lake, then sinks to the bottom of its final destination. We pay in environmental health costs with shellfish bed closures, fish behavior changes, human health and higher prices. Then we pay again to have to the toxic sediment removed from harbors and as hazardous waste it must be trucked to a special facility. There are simple fixes: if your car/truck leaks oil, get that leak fixed, turn the mower and blow lawn clippings back onto the lawn where they can do some good, and sweep up sediment and soil eroding to the sidewalk. DO NOT pour pesticides, paint bucket cleaning, rug shampoo or other chemicals down storm drains. (Yes, people still do.) We can all create landscape practices that protect our environment.

Hellebore leaf spot is caused by the fungus *Microsphaeropsis hellebori* (= *Coniothyrium hellebori*). It is restricted to Hellebores and won't spread to other plant genera. While *H. niger* is very susceptible, *H. argutifolius* is rarely affected because of its tough leaves. The disease is at its worst in late winter/early spring. Starting with the first small infection, spots develop on stems, flowers and leaves. They may have concentric rings, or coalesce to take out sections of leaf, stem or flowers, and eventually the entire leaf "melts down" and turns black. One management strategy is to remove all infected plant parts before the flowers and new growth emerge so that the fungus spores aren't present to affect the tender new tissue. Also, mulch the area so any infected leaf bits that fell to the soil are covered. See the PNW Disease Management Handbook for other controls.



Bergenia leaf spot fungus. *Bergenia* also develops a fungal leafspot. Researching for this article, I found that a) elephant ears also are known by the amusing name of pigsqueaks, b) there are many cultivars, and c) they are deer resistant. These plants often get a leaf spot fungus that starts out as small purple discolorations, that grow outward in concentric rings or waves. Eventually sections of leaves or the whole leaf are affected. There is also a virus leaf spot: prune out infected leaves and mulch in midwinter before new growth and flowers emerge in spring.



More than just a green thumb by Don Tapio. Don has worked for WSU Extension in King, Snohomish, Grays Harbor, Pacific and Thurston Counties. By now he knows all the questions gardeners can ask. Don's expertise, experience

and writing style make this compilation of his newspaper columns an easy read. Each chapter is a comprehensive bundle of information on a topic, citing relevant research and providing insights beyond most garden books. This book is arranged by months of the year and provides a good review of what questions gardeners will be asking. My copy is by my desk for those phone calls on why raspberries are crumbly (more than one reason), and why blooming tomatoes don't produce fruit. Concise and complete; the several articles per month are easily read in one sitting. The book was edited and published by the Master Gardener Foundation of Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties. Not in bookstores. Send inquiries to master_gardener_ghpc@yahoo.com

