

Tidbits

It's shocking

You walk into your favorite account looking forward to caring for the ten beautiful *Ficus* that have been growing perfectly for you. To your horror and shock every one of the *Ficus* are shedding yellow, green and yellow-green leaves. The soil of some are wet, some are dry. There are leaves dropping everywhere. What the heck is going on?

The month of May is a problem month for some interior plants. *Ficus* are one of those that are bothered. This is because of the weather changes outside and inside the buildings. Air conditioning gets turned on and turned off with changing outside temperatures. Inside on weekends, the air conditioning may get turned off to conserve energy and window offices can reach temperatures over 95 degrees.

Ficus hate changes in their environment. They let you know that their environment is in flux by shedding leaves of many colors in combination with changing their drinking habits. The *Ficus* that always drinks a whole bucket per week, suddenly is still wet on the surface at your next visit. The tree has just shut down due to its stress it's experiencing.

As technicians this is a hard one to deal with because this "*Ficus Shock*" can go on all summer if the interior climate keeps changing from day to day. The stressed-out *Ficus* will look less and less full as time goes on. And the stressed-out technician will be carrying away bags of leaves every week.

Resolution

Ask the client to close the window blinds before they go home on the weekend to keep the office a bit cooler. Also, leave individual office doors open for better air circulation within the office space. If possible, replant the tree into a sub-irrigation pot, to keep water available in correct amounts for the plant. Keep the plant bug free by keeping a sharp eye out for spider mites. These opportunistic critters will take over a stressed-out *Ficus*, quickly making things worse. When conditions are hot and dry, spider mite feeding activity is increased (they consume extra juices to avoid drying up), which then drives them to lay more eggs.

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situation is happening and by summer a new schedule of light and temperature fluctuations is in place. With this is a corresponding need to adjust our watering and also an increase in checking and treating for insects.

We've done our warm-up exercises

As always we horticulturalists have learned to persuade the plants we care for to adapt successfully under our ever-watchful eyes. Even though the amount of light they receive and the temperature they feel is out of balance with what would come naturally to them we must convince them that yes, it is indeed summer now.

Some of the older plants that have been around for a while want a little nourishment and a bit of pruning and shaping. Some even look as though a shower would feel nice.

In the winter if you skip that overgrown *Agalaonema* in the conference room by the west window for a couple weeks it will be fine. Now that it's summer you've got to get in there! No putting it off, you've found you've got to pick up your pace. It's time to get back in shape!

More is not always better

One of the most important tasks to do in the summer is not just to water more but also to check each plant to determine their individual water needs. Even though many plants will want more water, not all of them will, and it's important that each plant receive what's best for its weekly needs.

- Look and feel for turgor when you first approach the plant. For most plants, we can feel the foliage and determine whether there is the start of turgor loss or not. Does the foliage feel firm or flaccid? Are the leaves standing upright or dangling a bit down toward the floor? We want to water a plant just before it begins to wilt and lose turgidity. When a plant wilts it may survive the experience, but it is difficult to regain its attractive appearance.
- Check the soil by using your moisture meter (my favorite) or soil probe. Does this tool confirm your suspicions? Wet? Dry? Just right? Remember to check in a couple spots and be sure to notice how deep in the soil you are taking your readings.
- A third, yet less accurate way to determine how much water a plant may need is to lift the pot. Moist or wet soil will be heavier than a dry plant. This will give you only a rough estimate but that will give you yet another clue as to how much water will be needed. (Don't try this on those heavy floor plants but on the smaller plants we use for ground cover or in hanging containers.)

Who's hungry?

As we mentioned earlier, some of your interior plants will be needing some fertilizer. Plants that have been in your account for a while, those receiving lots of good light and those that have a well-established root system are all likely candidates for a light fertilization. Use an all-purpose one with the trace elements included and use it at half-strength, making sure the soil is already moist.

Exterior color pots will benefit from a regular fertilizing program even more so than those in the interiorscape. In order for those blooming plants and colorful foliage plants to continue to thrive they'll need the extra boost combined with extra water this time of year.

Insects

With summer's warm temperatures come the ever-increasing populations of insects. On every service visit, check EVERY plant for insects. Even if they have never had bugs before, do an inspection of their leaves and stems. As the saying goes, spring has sprung, fall has fell, summer is near, and it's buggier than _ _ _ _ .