

Taking Pictures of Pests and Plants for Identification

Often it is more convenient to send a picture of a plant or pest to your County Agent than it is to actually bring a sample in. We welcome your submissions, but do know that there is no substitute for actually having a specimen in the office to look at.

The following instructions will help you send in good, usable picture.

Insects:

To get an insect to hold still, you can put it into the freezer. This will euthanize it painlessly and make your life easier. Even a few minutes will slow it down long enough for a good picture to be taken.

Get a good close-up shot of the insect. To achieve this, turn on the macro setting on the camera. (It always looks like a tulip flower.) Next, turn on your flash. Finally, adjust the exposure compensation to -1.0 or more. Hold very still while you take the picture. The flash will freeze the action so that the image is not blurry. Ideally you would use a tripod.

I prefer images to have a neutral grey or light blue background.

This works well enough for many pests, but several require more detail to identify than you can usually get without a lot of work. For ants, I need a picture with their whole body, the constricted part of the body, and the antennae to have a fighting chance. It's usually best to bring in ants.

Trees & Shrubs:

To identify a tree, I need a picture of the whole tree and a close up of the leaf and how it attaches to the branch. If there are flowers, I would love to see those, too. Use the same trick as with the insects to get good flower images.

Weeds:

Take your photo so that the weed fills the entire picture. I cannot use a picture of your whole lawn with a weed popping up at a distance. Get close. I also need to know where it's growing.

In general, the bigger the photo the better, but I don't need 1 MB pictures. Usually images of around 200 KB work well. The setting on your camera for PC-sized photos works very well.

Also, take lots of pictures with different settings, and only send me the best ones. Don't send blurry images, as they do no good.

Send your images and questions to: dblakey@uaex.edu