Questioning a Questioner

Getting to the bottom of what someone is trying to ask can be the toughest part of any question and answer process. After all, if you don't know what people are asking, how can you give them a good answer?

Every MG working the Help Desk realizes that sometimes it is easier to find an answer than to determine exactly what the question is. If a person is calling the Hel p Desk, he may not be looking at his problem as one piece of a puzzle that may include not only his property as a whole, but perhaps his neighbors as well. Although the first question is needed for the Help Desk Log, the remaining questions can be used to create a diagnostic key that you'll use to resolve the problem for the customer.

1. What is the caller's name, phone number and locality?
2. Is the call about a home garden?
3. What is the plant in question?
4. Where is the plant growing? For how long?
5. What is its exposure to sun, wind, and rain?
6. What are the soil conditions? Drainage? Slope? Any soil test results?
7. What is the problem at hand? What are the obvious manifestations of disease, injury?
8. When was the problem first noticed? Has the damage progressed over time?
9. What portion of the plant has the most damage?
10. Did the damage start there or spread to there?
11. Is the damaged portion in an area of the plant that is significantly exposed or protected from the elements (sun or rain)?
12. Are any other plants around it affected? What kind of plants are they?
13. Have any pesticides, fertilizers or lime been applied recently? At what rate?
14. Is there physical damage to the trunk? Roots?
15. Is there any standing water?
16. What have the weather conditions been like lately?
17. Has there been any unnatural stress on the planting site (construction, people, animals, traffic, etc.)?