

BE ON THE WATCH FOR SUDDEN OAK DEATH (SOD)

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In 2019, the plant disease, sudden oak death (SOD) has found its way to the Midwest via infected nursery stock and was subsequently distributed to retail stores throughout the Midwest. *Phytophthora ramorum*, the causal agent (fungus) of Sudden Oak Death (SOD) was confirmed on ornamental landscape plants. SOD has been responsible for the death of numerous oaks and other native plants in Oregon and Washington.

SOD is currently under an international quarantine, but the fungal spores can easily move with irrigation water, rainwater, and flowing water. Since, SOD is a water mold fungus and moves by precipitation runoff, irrigation waters, and by streams and rivers, the concern is that, with the very wet springs in 2019 and 2020, SOD spores from infected plants could be transported off-site from retail outlets and/or home landscapes and begin infecting oaks and other hardwood species.

Additionally, we do not fully understand how lethal SOD will be to our Midwestern oaks and other hardwood species. That is why prevention is the best management tactic by keeping a lookout for symptomatic plants. Also, a number of Midwestern states are currently conducting sampling and monitoring surveys downstream from known locations where the infected plants were shipped. Water samples were taken this past spring to determine if SOD spores were present in runoff water. Additional water samples will be taken later this fall when water temperatures moderate. Leaves of a susceptible rhododendron species are placed in the water sample and then cultured for a number of days to see if SOD is present. Results from these samples will be used to help determine if SOD is present in a given area.

Once the spores land on the bark or leaf of a plant, the spores are able to penetrate the plant's leaf cuticle or bark killing plant tissue resulting in a bleeding canker (Figures 1, 2). As the cankered area grows in size, the plant eventually wilts and dies (Figure 4). In rhododendrons, a common landscape plant, the pathogen causes leaf blight and twig dieback and is commonly called ramorum leaf and shoot blight. Blight symptoms include leaf spots and wilting and stems and/or trunks that have a brown or black discoloration (Figure 3).

Like many invasive pests and pathogens, humans are the most efficient agent for long range spread of the disease. Infected plants and movement of spores on shoes, bike and automobile tires, tools, implements, and in infected soil can spread the disease over large areas.

To date, SOD has been positively confirmed on the following plants and varieties in Illinois including:

- **Rhododendron** – “Cat Cunningham Blush, Firestorm, Holden, Minnetonka, Nova Zembla, Percy Wiseman, Purpureum Elegans, Roseum Elegans, Wojnars Purple”.
- **Lilac** – Common Purple, Persian Lime.

To help in the detection and potential spread of SOD, know the symptoms associated with SOD and realize there are many other causes (i.e. poorly drained or high pH soils, drought), other diseases, and insects that can cause similar symptoms. **NOTE: At this time, there is no cure for SOD.**

For more details and photos, please visit <http://www.suddenoakdeath.org/diagnosis-and-management/hosts-and-symptoms/>.

If you think your plant(s) is/are infected, contact the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA) or your local extension office for further guidance. **It is not recommended to destroy or dispose of these plants without State or Federal guidance.**



Figures 1 and 2: Bleeding cankers caused by SOD



Figure 3: “Water-soaked leaves

Figure 4: SOD caused tree mortality