

Agrobacterium Crown Gall Disease in Woody Plants *by Chelsi Abbott MSc*

What's in a name?

Agrobacterium tumefaciens (*A. tumefaciens*), commonly known as crown gall (Fig 1), is a bacterial disease found worldwide (EPPO 2023). However, the taxonomic revisions of this bacterial disease have made classification complicated. *Agrobacteria* spp. are members of the family Rhizobiaceae, a family that also includes the symbiotic nitrogen-fixing bacteria *Rhizobium* spp. (Young et al. 2001). Relatively recent RNA sequencing suggests that bacteria historically classified as *Agrobacterium* are not distinctive from *Rhizobium* and therefore both should be united under the genus *Rhizobium* (Young et al. 2001). Thus, in some publications *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* is referred to as *Rhizobium radiobacter*. However, there lacks consistency in the literature and both names are still used.

Further complicating classification, *Agrobacterium* spp. were historically delineated based on the three types of host symptom expression: tumour-inducing (*A. tumefaciens*), hairy root or root-inducing (*A. rhizogenes*), and non-pathogenic strains (*A. radiobacter*) (Otten et al 2008). Two more tumour-inducing strains have been recently characterized: *A. rubi* (tumour-inducing on Rosaceae (rose) family) and *A. vitis* (tumour-inducing on Vitaceae family) (Young et al. 2001, Kado 2002). Since these different strains of *Agrobacterium* species produce similar symptoms, publications either use an umbrella



Figure 1: Crown gall present on the trunk of a *Malus* spp. Taken by Chelsi Abbott, Davey Institute.

term for all known pathogenic tumour-inducing *Agrobacteria*, 'Agrobacterium species complex', or simply *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*.

For clarity and consistency, this publication will use the name *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* when discussing the tumour-inducing pathogenic strain.

How does *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* affect trees and shrubs?

A. tumefaciens detects root exudation from root tissues or root wounds and, using whip-like flagella, moves towards wounded susceptible host plants (Kado 2002, Lacy & Hansen 2009). This process is called chemotaxis, which is the movement in a specific direction based on the increased concentration gradient of a particular chemical substance in the host exudate. Once in contact with the host, virulence genes are triggered, causing infection and transfer of the tumour-inducing plasmid (also known as Ti-DNA), which is circular DNA independent of the cell's chromosomal DNA (Gelvin 2017). This plasmid integrates into the host plant genome, resulting in upregulation of hormone production, specifically auxins and opines (Britton et al 2008). Increase in these hormones results in non-self-limiting growth and cell replication, which ultimately form tumours or galls (Gelvin 2017, Britton et al. 2008). The result of these tumours is to create a sink of plant resources that act as a source of food for the infecting bacteria (Britton et al 2008).

Interestingly, scientists have co-opted this natural phenomenon of genetic manipulation by replacing oncogenes, which are genes that encourage abnormal proliferation of cells, with desirable traits (Banta & Montenegro 2008). Mostly used in agriculture, crop yield has been

continued on page 4

Table of Contents

Agrobacterium Crown Gall Disease in Woody Plants	1
President's Message	3
Calendar of Events	8
Funding for Urban Forestry is Here!	9
2024 Changes to IAA Tree Worker Training: MATP & CATP	12
NEMF Meetings	14



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Mission Statement

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President's Message

Greetings Illinois Arborists,

I hope your winter holidays were full of laughs and memories. Right after those holidays came New Year's Eve. New Year is both a time of celebration but also a time of reflection on the year that has passed. Looking back, we can see the past trials we faced, new opportunities we took, and the business side of how profitable last year was.

No matter the memory or spreadsheet you are looking back on there is one thing that is a constant, time. In the thirteen hundreds, Geoffrey Chaucer wrote that "Time and Tide wait for no man" centuries later these words hold true.

As we gear up to hit the ground running as soon as spring hits keep time in mind. Finding a life-work balance can be difficult but is of utmost importance. There is no simple equation to find that balance as everyone's life and values can be very different. The key start is asking yourself "Am I present in the things I do or am I just going through the motions? The answer is critical.

We work in a very dangerous industry. At the Annual Fall Conference, Dr. John Ball showed that Tree Workers are three times more likely to get killed on the job than the police and fire department. In countless safety talks over the years, the same point is made that "Complacency Kills!" so if you are "going through the motions" chances are you are raising your risk of injury.

Life is more than just work. If we work to be present in our interactions with coworkers and those whom we share our lives with even a short conversation can have an impact and be memorable.

Happy New Year, let's make it a memorable one.

Daniel O'Brien
Illinois Arborist Association President
Certified Arborist and CTSP

Dan O'Brien



Agrobacterium Crown Gall Disease in Woody Plants (cont.)

increased by introducing genes that enhance nutrient utilization or resistance to pathogens (Banta & Montenegro 2008). Furthermore, drought, salinity, and extreme temperature tolerance have also been improved by transferring desirable genetic material into plants (Banta & Montenegro 2008). Future considerations in this area of biotechnology are shifting from a solely agricultural perspective to those of ecological and human health (Banta & Montenegro 2008). It is the aim of some research to assess if this genetic manipulation can be implemented in integrated management (IPM) strategies and consequently reduce pesticides in the environment (Banta & Montenegro 2008).

Host range and spread

A. tumefaciens has a wide host range of over 50 families of plants, some of which include: stone fruits, roses, walnuts, pines, Douglas-firs, euonymus, and willow (Kado 2002, Lacy & Hansen 2009).

A. tumefaciens is a soil borne bacterium that can spread via infected nursery stock, unsanitary pruning tools, injuries from weeding, hoeing, cultivation, and other equipment, movement of infected soil, and rain splash (Kado 2002). The bacteria spreads best at temperatures around 15-30C (59-86F). As with many plant pathogens, moisture in the form of rain or relative humidity facilitates infection development (Garrett 1978). Agrobacteria species in general have relatively slow generation intervals (1.5 to several hours), but they are tolerant of desiccation, allowing them to persist in conditions non-conductive to reproduction (Garrett 1978).

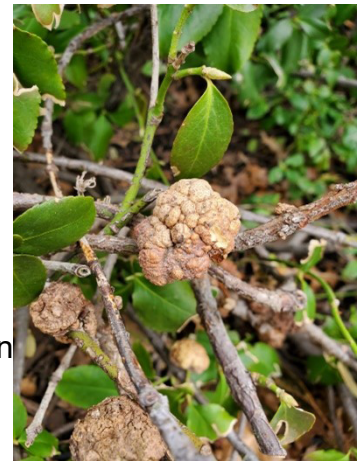


Figure 2: Multiple young, small crown galls on a *Euonymus*. Photo courtesy of Nick Saba, Davey Tree Expert Company

continued on page 5

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Agrobacterium Crown Gall Disease in Woody Plants (cont.)

Diagnosing Agrobacterium tumefaciens

Diagnosing *A. tumefaciens* with certainty in the field can be difficult. Symptoms of this disease are woody, tumour-like growths near the soil line, crown, or on the roots of the host (Lacy & Hansen 2009). The galls can be light brown to black, depending on the host species and the gall age (Fig 2). The size of the individual galls can vary from 5-30 cm (2-12 inches) in diameter (Lacy & Hansen 2009). Depending on the host, the outer surface of the gall may have a corky, textured appearance and when cut in half the gall will show only plant tissue inside (Fig 3). Signs of the bacteria itself are not detectable in field observations, so diagnosis typically relies on the species attacked and symptoms. This can be tricky because hypertrophy symptoms (the over production of cells and increase in cell size) that result in tumours or galls are also a common symptom of some fungal diseases, herbicide damage, insect feeding, and other physiological responses.



Figure 3: Cross section of a single crown gall. Photo courtesy of Nick Saba, Davey Tree Expert Company

Below are some potential look alike conditions and diagnostic differences.

Look alike disease or condition	Diagnostic differences (compared to <i>A. tumefaciens</i>)
Phomopsis gall (Fig 4) – woody galls caused by a fungus that occurs in hickory, red oaks, and some maple species	Galls are small and numerous, generally on the trunk and in the canopy of specific tree species (location and host is important)
Burl wood (Fig 5) – large, corky gall like growths forming in the trunks of certain species of trees. Cause is unknown, but could be result of stress, injury, or a natural phenomenon.	Large size and location of galls along with potential presence of water sprouts growing from the gall itself.
Insect or mite galls (Fig 6) – small galls present on branches or leaf tissue of plants. Galls can be numerous and may have other hypertrophy symptoms like hairs or spikes. Galls tend to be host specific.	Galls mostly present in canopy and branch tissue and not on trunk, crown or roots. Depending on the insect or mite that produced the gall there may be an exit hole or larvae/larval chambers present inside when cut in half.
Herbicide damage (Fig 7) – Small galls sometimes producing stunting/malformed leaves may be present after the misapplication of certain herbicides.	Appearance of tissue may appear gall-like but upon further examination other hypertrophy symptoms (e.g., witches brooming or ‘rosetting’ accompanied with leaf cupping/curling is more likely the case. Symptoms will generally occur in a uniform pattern in the landscape.



Figure 4: Phomopsis gall on hickory, taken by Chelsi Abbott, Davey Institute.



Figure 5: Burl wood on honeylocust, taken by Chelsi Abbott, Davey Institute



Figure 6: Insect (horned-oak) galls. Photo courtesy of Dan Herms, Davey Institute.



Figure 7: Herbicide drift damage on hydrangea, taken by Chelsi Abbott, Davey Institute.

continued on page 7

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Agrobacterium Crown Gall Disease in Woody Plants (cont.)

If the field diagnostician is in doubt of whether the galls are caused by *A. tumefaciens*, sending samples into a plant diagnostic laboratory able to perform DNA testing for this disease is an option.

Points of concern

With its wide host range and ability to spread easily, concern about *A. tumefaciens* infection is warranted. Tumour-like growth can inhibit vascular system transport in the plant, eventually limiting nutrient and water transport (Lacy & Hansen 2009, Otten et al 2008). Thus, damage from crown galls can lead to decreased vigor over time, particularly in small trees and shrubs or when the galls are located primarily near the crown (Otten et al 2008). Furthermore, infected plants may become more vulnerable to other abiotic and biotic stressors creating a complex of issues that lead to decline.

The effect of *A. tumefaciens* infection on tree stability may also merit attention. Empirical evidence is lacking, but galls could cause weak points in wood, potentially leading to wind throw. Considering a gall's size and location, targets, and risk tolerance, when conducting tree risk assessments may be prudent.

Management

Management of *A. tumefaciens* in the landscape is predominantly preventative and cultural. Because the bacteria require a wound to infect, avoid wounding the host plant if possible (Lacy & Hansen 2009, Grabowski 2019). If *A. tumefaciens* is diagnosed and already present, remove the crown galls 2-4 inches beyond the actual gall where possible. It is not recommended to remove the diseased tissue during conducive conditions (rainy periods or period of high relative humidity) as this can facilitate disease spread. Sanitizing tools between cuts with an alcohol-based sanitizer or a 10% solution of bleach is essential to reduce spread of the disease (Lacy & Hansen 2009, Grabowski 2019). Once the galls are removed, bag the galls in plastic bags or containers to contain the bacterium and limit possible spread

to other plants on site. If possible, destroy them off site ideally by burning the material (Grabowski 2019). Woodchippers will not destroy the bacterium but instead may risk spreading infection further (Lacy & Hansen 2009). Before proceeding to other properties or sites, be sure all pruning tools and removal or cultivation equipment is properly sanitized.

The bacteria spreads easily via soil, so mitigate unnecessary foot traffic on an infected site. Mulching can be done to create a barrier over the soil to reduce spread via shoe contamination and splashing rain. If an infected area needs to be accessed before the galls can be removed and destroyed, wear disposable shoe covers. Take care to properly dispose of shoe covers to reduce contaminating adjacent areas. Avoid planting susceptible species in an area of known infection (Lacy & Hansen 2009). It is suggested that planting a non-susceptible species, such as those in the monocot (grass) family, for three years can eliminate *A. tumefaciens*, since their preferred host has been removed (Lacy & Hansen 2009).

Promoting root colonization by non-antagonistic bacteria and fungi with compost and mulch to encourage a robust microbial community may outcompete *A. tumefaciens* and thus reduce its ability to reproduce and infect (Cooksey 1980). Commercially available biopesticides containing the non-pathogenic *A. radiobacter* strain K84 are also available, which aim to outcompete and therefore reduce the effect of the pathogenic *A. tumefaciens* in the soil (Lacy & Hansen 2009). However, definitive results on the efficacy of these products are still pending so expectations with this product should be set appropriately (Stewart 2001).

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continued on page 9

~ Calendar of Events ~

January Events

January 18th - NEMF Meeting - The Morton Arboretum (10:00am - 12:00pm) Michelle Catania
200 Village Green Lincolnshire, IL 60069

Michelle will discuss soil health related to urban trees and the role municipalities can take in improving air quality using vegetative barriers.

[Click here to register](#)

March Events

March 5th - May 7th, ISA Certified Arborist Exam Prep Course (6:00pm - 8:30pm)
Community Room, Village Hall – 255 E Wilson Ave. Lombard, IL 60148

ISA Certification is a voluntary program that tests and certifies your achievement of a professional level of knowledge and skill in the field of arboriculture. When you become an ISA Certified Arborist®, you are recognized by your peers and the public as a tree care professional who has attained a generally-accepted level of knowledge in areas such as tree biology, diagnosis, maintenance practices, safety, and other subject and practice areas within the tree care profession as identified through periodic job task analyses.

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Funding for Urban Forestry is Here! *by Zach Wirtz*

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is set to bring \$1.5 billion in funding to urban and community forestry across the country in the next few years. Arborists can play an important role in bringing this unprecedented opportunity to communities. Grant applications are available now for IRA funding through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, which is being administered by The Morton Arboretum's Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI). Government entities, including municipalities, park districts, forest preserves, townships, and counties with [areas considered disadvantaged](#) are eligible to apply for funds to improve urban and community forestry across Illinois.

Urban forests are critical infrastructure and a community asset that needs protection and improvement. Arborists in many disciplines, from municipal arborists to consultants, to climbers, to tree growers and planters, must be ready to push our communities to take advantage of this opportunity and help them be prepared for success. Your urban forestry knowledge and experience will be critical in assisting proposal development and implementation. Even if you do not work for a municipality, you can collaborate with local government entities or share information within your professional networks!

In underserved and disadvantaged areas especially, trees emerge as powerful tools for positive change, offering far-reaching benefits. Trees are a form of community infrastructure that offers a range of advantages and solutions that enhance the lives of residents and contribute to the overall well-being of neighborhoods. Trees can help your community to deal with major challenges such as urban heat islands, air pollution, and flooding mitigation. To be effective, however, trees need proper planning, installation, and maintenance, just like roads, sewers, and buildings. Unlike built infrastructure, trees increase in value over time and produce more benefits for a community as they mature, making it critical to not only plant new trees but to manage and protect mature canopy.



continued on page 10

Funding for Urban Forestry is Here! (cont.)

Through projects and initiatives that involve tree planting and maintenance, underserved and disadvantaged neighborhoods can flourish into vibrant, sustainable havens, illustrating the impact of nature on people and the resilience of communities against adversity.

This IRA grant funding stands as a potentially once-in-a-career opportunity for municipalities and other governments to create vibrant, resilient urban ecosystems. This funding paves the way for greener, more sustainable urban landscapes by providing the means to conduct tree inventories, develop management plans, plant trees, perform maintenance, and support staff. CRTI is currently administering two sub-grant opportunities for Illinois government entities with the following specific requirements:

1. Urban and Community Forestry Grant for Government Entities:

Government entities, in Illinois that are working in disadvantaged communities, including municipalities, park districts, counties, Tribal governments, townships, forest preserves, and other local units of government, can apply to receive \$25,000 to \$150,000 for projects that increase tree canopy, improve forest health and create or enhance community forestry programs in disadvantaged areas. In addition, all funded projects must complete the development or enhancement of a tree protection ordinance (prior to completion of the grant) to meet the basic standards in the Request for Proposals. The Morton Arboretum offers free assistance to complete this requirement. These ordinances will set standards of care for newly planted trees and help to ensure tree canopy is maintained and protected long after the grant ends. Applications are due by March 1, 2024.

2. Tree Inventory and Management Plan Grant for Communities over 75,000

Residents: Illinois municipalities with over 75,000 residents can apply for up to \$3 million to conduct public tree inventories within their boundaries and create Urban and Community

Forest Management Plans based on that inventory. Application of some portion of the Management Plan is required as part of the project, coupled with strategies for maintaining or improving the tree canopy in the municipality's disadvantaged areas. Applications are due by March 1, 2024.

Traditionally, grant match spending, where a grant recipient must contribute a specified amount of their own funds in proportion to the grant received, has been required for federal funding. With this IRA funding, **no match spending is required, which is an unprecedented opportunity at this scale.**

More than 500 Illinois municipalities contain areas considered to be disadvantaged, based on the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, EPA EJ Screening Tool, and HUD Opportunity Zones. A map of areas eligible for funding, including parks and other public lands, is available on the [Illinois IRA Screening Tool](#). The [Municipal IRA \(MIRA\) Screening Tool](#) also identifies municipalities that are eligible for funding.

A second round of IRA funding will be available in the spring of 2024, provided by a USDA Forest Service Grant to The Morton Arboretum. This funding will be available to government entities as well as community groups, non-profits, HOAs, public universities, and libraries. Government entities are strongly encouraged to apply for the current IDNR funding and not wait until the second allocation is available.

To stay up to date on urban forestry funding opportunities, sign up for the monthly [CRTI newsletter](#) and check the [CRTI events page](#) for informational workshops. This funding season is a once-in-a-career opportunity, so be sure to be proactive! If you have questions, reach out to CRTI.grants@mortonarb.org.

Applications for the sub-grants are available at ChicagoRTI.org/grants.

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2024 Changes to IAA Tree Worker Training: MATP & CATP

by Aaron Schulz

The Illinois Arborist Association (IAA) has a long history of providing industry-leading training through its Advanced Training program. IAA Advanced Training is a program through which you can add to your basic knowledge as a Certified Arborist and fine-tune your skill set to your area of expertise. Within this program are four domains: Pest Diagnosis & Management, Tree Site & Selection, Tree Worker, and Urban Forestry. To learn more about this program you can find more information [here](#). In addition to Advanced Training, IAA's training program also includes the [Municipal Arborist Training Program \(MATP\)](#) and the [Commercial Arborist Training Program \(CATP\)](#), both of which were new training program offerings in 2023.

MATP and CATP are designed to fit the needs of your staff, in both the municipal and commercial sectors, and are completely customizable to fit the skill levels of your team. Training is offered at your facility during the weekdays and utilizes your equipment, so you have a complete understanding of the equipment that you are already using on a day-to-day basis.

MATP & CATP training topics include:

- Aerial Lift Safety, Rescue & Operations
- Chainsaw Basic Maintenance, Safe Operation, Cutting Techniques & Sharpening
- Chipper Safety & Operation
- Felling Safety & Techniques using the 6-step Precision Felling Plan
- Pruning Techniques
- Rigging Principles & Fundamentals

Many individuals and organizations have already taken advantage of MATP and CATP and since it was such a great success, we are continuing these programs indefinitely. In 2024 there will be changes to training requests, pricing, scheduling, and the amount of MATP

and CATP training offerings per year so that our instructors are able to provide the best training possible. Current changes to Tree Worker Advanced Training, MATP, and CATP trainings include:

- Standardized Pricing for low- and high-risk trainings (within 200 miles roundtrip)
- Enhanced Online Training Request Form
- Elimination of Half-Day Trainings
- Maximum of 25 weekday classes for MATP & CATP
 - Maximum of 12 weekend classes for Advanced Training: Tree Worker
- Maximum of 12 students per instructor for MATP & CATP
 - Maximum of 7 students for Advanced Training: Tree Worker
- To accommodate instructor schedules and insurance deadlines, trainings will only be scheduled 1 quarter in advance
 - Example: only Quarter 2 trainings will be scheduled during Quarter 1

The Advanced Training Committee and its instructors hope that these changes will streamline training requests for the best experience possible and we look forward to working with your teams in 2024!



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NEMF Meetings

December 21st, 2023

10:00am – 12:00pm (noon)

Location: Community Room, Village Hall - 255 E Wilson Ave. Lombard, IL 60148

Speaker: Colette Copic, Chicago Region Trees Initiative

Title: 21st Century Ordinance Builder

Description: As communities expand and develop, it's important to maximize your community's resources for sustainable and long-term growth. Implementing tree protections into a development code is one way to ensure that future generations will enjoy the many benefits of trees, while balancing the benefits of development. In this seminar, Colette will give key recommendations for drafting important tree protections in your landscape or zoning ordinances. Specifically, Colette will explain the latest interactive tool from CRTI to help you craft tree preservation code in your community. This tool was co-created by CRTI, The Morton Arboretum, and the CRTI Trees and Green Infrastructure Workgroup and contains different key components related to trees and their protections commonly found in zoning or development ordinances in Illinois.

January 18th, 2024

10:00am – 12:00pm (noon)

Location: The Morton Arboretum - Cudahy Auditorium in the Research Building
4100 Illinois Route 53 Lisle, Illinois 60532

Speaker: Michelle Catania – Green Industry Outreach Coordinator, The Morton Arboretum

Topic: Michelle will discuss soil health related to urban trees and the role municipalities can take in improving air quality using vegetative barriers.

Healthy, undisturbed soil is a key component to achieve future tree canopy goals. Unfortunately, soils with ideal characteristics at supporting long-lived trees are becoming increasingly rare in the built environment. As we continue to emphasize the ecosystem services our urban trees provide, understanding below-ground conditions should be a key component to this discussion. Healthy soils offer greater stormwater storage during rain events and can provide sufficient reservoirs of water to get trees through prolonged periods of drought. Improvements to urban soils in the built environment will lead to healthy trees. Healthy, diverse forests are also better at combating pest and disease outbreaks as they have greater resources to overcome a potential infestation if they are not stressed.



Illinois Trees



Inside this issue

Agrobacterium Crown Gall Disease in Woody Plants
Funding for Urban Forestry is Here!
2024 Changes to IAA Tree Worker Training: MATP & CATP
NEMF Meetings