

Agriculture & Natural Resources



HENRICO HORTICULTURE

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Avoid Spreading Boxwood Blight This Holiday

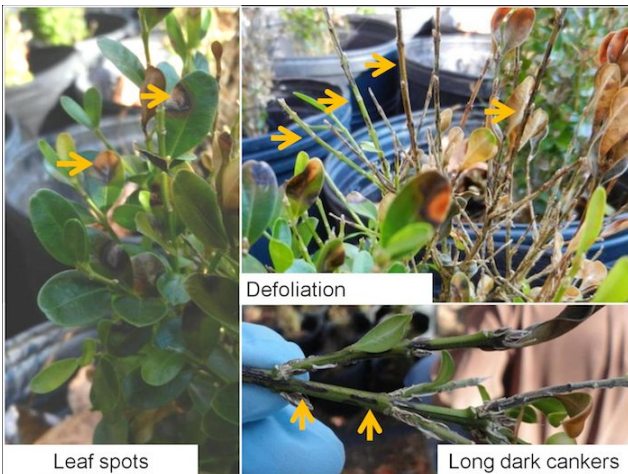
*Adapted and edited by Ed Olsen, Associate Extension Agent
from various VCE publications*

Virginia Cooperative Extension is once again cautioning the public to take measures to avoid spreading the devastating boxwood blight when decorating for the holidays this year. Do you know that boxwood greeneries and decorations could carry the boxwood blight pathogen to your property, destroying precious boxwood plantings that your family has had for generations and threatening those of your neighbors?

Researchers say that boxwood blight could threaten the plants in the same way that the chestnut blight destroyed trees in the 1930s. “The boxwood is not just a plant. It’s part of Virginia’s cultural heritage,” said Chuanxue Hong, Extension specialist in ornamental horticulture at the Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center. Boxwoods are the mainstays of landscapes in many historical sites across the commonwealth and an important nursery crop. The wholesale market value for boxwood nursery production is \$103 million annually.



Defoliation on mature plants; Photo Credit: A. Bordas



The three main symptoms of boxwood blight: leaf spots, black streaking on stems and defoliation; Photo Credit: N. Dart

In order to help prevent widespread destruction of boxwoods, researchers are asking the public take precautions when using plant cuttings, pruning existing plants, and maintaining plants in household and historical landscapes.

Boxwood blight is caused by a fungal pathogen that renders the emerald green leaves brown and dry. The fungus can rapidly defoliate boxwood plants, leading to plant death, making the plants unsuitable for commercial sale, and wiping out ornamental landscapes. The disease spreads primarily by infected plant materials and infested soil from infected plants. This pathogen produces sticky spores that attach to plant containers, tools, vehicles, shoes, clothes and even animals such as dogs and deer.

Avoiding visits to infested sites, purchasing and using noninfected plant materials, and practicing strict sanitation methods are crucial to prevent the spread of the disease.

The following simple steps are recommended to mitigate the spread of boxwood blight through holiday clippings:

- When boxwood plants or cuttings are purchased, ask the retailer if the greenery comes from a supplier in the Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program. Growers in this program adhere to current best management practices.

- Inspect any newly purchased boxwood greenery for symptoms of the disease, including leaf spots, leaf browning, black streaks on stems, and leaf drop. Any greenery that has these symptoms should be double-bagged and discarded in the landfill. Do not compost infected greenery.
- When the holiday season is over, all greenery decorations need to be disposed of properly — double bag them immediately and then throw in trash to be taken to the landfill without delay to avoid any unnecessary complications.
- Use 70 percent alcohol or Lysol Spray Brand III with 58 percent alcohol to sanitize everything that has been in contact with the greeneries and decorations. Consumers are reminded to read and follow all label directions when using these products.

Henrico residents can submit plant samples manifesting symptoms of box blight to the Henrico Extension Office for diagnosis and control recommendations.



While the term “invasive plants, pests and diseases” may not be familiar to everyone, the effects of invasive species in Henrico County should be of concern to all of us. Once invasive pests become established, they can grow and spread rapidly, often because they have no natural predators in their new environment. Invasive pests cost landowners, industry and the U.S. government millions of dollars to control, so taking steps to prevent their introduction is the most effective method of reducing both the risk of invasive species infestations and the cost to control and mitigate those infestations.

Henrico residents can help reduce the spread of invasive pests and plants into the county and the Commonwealth by following these simple steps:

1. Learn about invasive species, especially those found in our region. Invasive species such as the Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, gypsy moth and imported fire ant wreak havoc on the environment and also displace or destroy native plants and insects.
2. Clean hiking boots, waders, boats and trailers, off-road vehicles and other gear to stop invasive species from hitching a ride to a new location. Learn more at PlayCleanGo.org
3. Avoid dumping aquariums or live bait into waterways. Learn more at Habitattitude.org
4. Don't move firewood - instead, buy it where you'll burn it, or gather on site when permitted. Gypsy moth egg cases and emerald ash borer larvae can hitch a ride with the firewood and start infestations in new areas. Learn more at DontMoveFirewood.org
5. Use forage, hay, mulch and soil that are certified as "weed free."
6. Consult with your local nursery or master gardener to help you select plants that are not invasive for your landscaping and gardening projects, and remove any known invaders.
7. Volunteer to help remove invasive species from public lands and natural areas.

Gardening Things To Do

December-January	February	March
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on the past gardening season and make notes of the successes you want to repeat and the improvements that you can make. • Clean up gardening equipment, sharpen tools and take motorized equipment to be tuned up. Don't forget to add fuel stabilizer to the gas tank. • Enjoy those snowy days looking through catalogs and preparing for the upcoming season. • Carefully spread salt used to melt ice on walks and driveways to avoid damage to nearby shrubs or turf. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start seedlings indoors of cole crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and Brussel sprouts for transplanting into the garden in March. • Check the roses in your Valentine's arrangement for "bent neck." When your roses droop this way, it is best to pull them from the arrangement and discard since recutting the stems will not perk them up again. • Lenten roses, not even distantly related to real roses, are a treat in the middle of winter when most perennials are still dormant. This evergreen, herbaceous perennial begins its flowering in February and provides buttercup-like blossoms to be enjoyed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the day length is increasing, houseplants may be waking up from their winter slumber and begin to grow again. Now is the time to start fertilizing. But save the repotting to April. • Start seedlings indoors of warm season crops like tomatoes and peppers for transplanting into the garden in late April/early May after the last frost. • It's too early to start mowing, but you can prepare for that first mowing in April by removing sticks, rocks and other debris from your lawn to prevent damaging the mower or injuring yourself when mowing



SMART Lawns

**A Residential Lawn Care
Program to Protect
Water Quality**

What to Expect from the SMART Lawns Program

A Master Gardener volunteer will come to your home to collect a lawn soil sample and measure your total lawn area. Once we receive the results of your soil analysis, we will formulate a Nutrient Management Plan that will tell you the right kind of fertilizer to apply to your lawn at the right rate and at the right time. Lawn aeration combined with proper maintenance strategies will help correct weed and disease issues, improving the health and appearance of your lawn.

The program runs April to August 15 with the Nutrient Management Plan typically beginning in September, just in time with overseeding or starting your lawn!

Applications will be available beginning in March at Henrico.us/extension/anr/lawns.

Keeping Your Lawn Healthy This Winter

*Ed Olsen, Associate Extension Agent
and from various VCE publications by Dr. Mike Goatley*

The fescue and/or bluegrass lawn that is so prevalent in Henrico is reliably winter hardy. However, while well adapted to winter, these cool season turf varieties may be injured in cold weather. There are a number of things that you can do *and* also not do to minimize the risk of winter turf damage.

START WITH GOOD CULTURAL PRACTICES:

Proper Fall Fertilizer: Did you fertilize correctly in the fall? In Henrico, the last date to apply fertilizer is the end of November. Fertilization during the winter period leads to higher potential leaching and runoff risk of the nutrients.

Final Cut: The final cut of the season should be on the lower recommendation for height for fescue or bluegrass. That would make your final cut of the year at 3" height. This keeps your grass from getting too tall and having those tall blades that flop over on itself which can promote diseases. After your final mowing, put your lawn mower to rest for the winter by having the blade sharpened and performing a tune-up.

Visit <http://bit.ly/2AepVhF> to listen to a podcast on mower servicing by Dr. Mike Goatley, Turfgrass Extension Specialist, Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Stay off Frozen Turf: Trafficking on frost or ice-covered turf usually results in extensive physical "breaking" of the leaves. The xylem and phloem tissues that are involved in moving water, nutrients, and carbohydrates around in the plant are usually severed when traffic is applied to ice-covered foliage. The damaged turf leaf blades don't fall away completely from the stem, but instead slowly turn brown and die. So follow the practice of golf courses and stay off frost covered or frozen turf. It is OK to go on turf covered by snow. The snow will help cushion and protect the blade from damage as well as protect it from extreme cold.

Stay off Overly Saturated Turf: Winter rains or melting snow can make your lawn saturated with water. When this happens, stay off the turf to avoid compaction. Remember that you just aerated the lawn in the fall to improve compaction in the lawn; do not undo that work now by walking over overly saturated turf.

Be Careful with Ice Melt Materials: Standard ice melt compounds are usually some form (or combination of) chloride-based salts. Limited use of any of these products should cause little injury. Problems begin when they are used excessively and there is not adequate rainfall to wash or leach the material from the area. We are often prone to over applying ice melt just to make sure the ice and snow melts. Keep in mind this can damage concrete surfaces as well as the plants and grass growing along the walks and driveways. If problems develop, they are normally latent and do not show up until spring or summer.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THESE WINTER PESTS AND DISEASES:

Winter Weed Control: Maintaining a vigorous turfgrass stand will protect against weed infestation. However, during the winter months turfgrasses are not actively growing and are, therefore, susceptible to the encroachment of winter annual broadleaf weeds. Winter annuals germinate in the late summer and early fall months, live during the winter and die in the late



Identifying purple deadnettle (left) and henbit (right) can be quite easy if you know what to look for. (The light colored plant growing among the other plants is common chickweed. Henbit has petioles (the stalk that attaches the leaf to the stem) on the lower leaves but not on upper leaves. Purple deadnettle has long petioles on lower leaves and short petioles on upper leaves. Photo Credit: <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/ukturf/5-5-14.html>

spring or early summer with the onset of high temperatures. Examples include annual bluegrass, common chickweed, purple deadnettle and henbit. Controlling winter annual broadleaf weeds before they are able to set seed will not only reduce the likelihood of an outbreak the following year, but improve the aesthetic quality of the turfgrass stand.

Control of winter annuals includes removing plants now by hoeing or hand pulling. Broadleaf herbicides can also be effective if used while the weed is actively growing or before the weed flowers in

early spring. Realize herbicides are not effective at cold temperatures. Generally postemergence herbicides are used when temperatures are $> 50^{\circ}$ F. Be sure to read and follow all label directions.

Snow Molds: Snow molds are not nearly as big of a problem in Virginia lawns as they are further north. However, when they occur, they certainly attract a lot of attention. Following winters with extended snowfall, it is possible that cool-season lawn grasses have been attacked by either pink or gray snow mold. The blighted turf will be a circular patch of varying size of matted down turf. The diseases are more likely to occur on succulent turfgrass leaves that received very high levels of fall Nitrogen fertilization; so again, proper fall fertilizer is key. It is not generally recommended that home lawns be treated for snow molds because the disease is rarely going to kill turf in this setting. Use a heavy garden rake to work up the matted turf in the affected areas in order to increase air and moisture movement into the turf canopy. Observe the area over the next 7 days or so to see if new shoots are emerging from the crowns. If you don't see any signs of new growth after that time period, then plan on reseeding these areas.

Red Thread or Pink Patch: Spring-like temperatures and plenty of moisture result in ideal conditions for turfgrass diseases to make an appearance in lawns, particularly cool-season grasses. The disease present is likely one of two things: Red thread or Pink patch. The bright red to pink mycelial growth of this fungus is plainly visible early in the morning, particularly when the dew is still on the grass. The disease will remain an eyesore as long as cool, moist periods persist, but the fungus only attacks the foliage and rarely will the entire plant die. What should you do to manage this disease? Almost always, the proper treatment is to leave it alone rather than applying a fungicide. As the weather warms and dries, red thread and pink patch will gradually disappear.

Voles: Voles will make runways under lasting snow cover in lawns as they feed on grass blades and roots and are protected from predators. Damage is frequently mistaken as mole damage, but moles are not active during winter and actually tunnel below the soil surface. Vole damage appears as runways or winding trails of damaged grass. Lawns usually fill-in as conditions warm in spring. A winter without lasting snow is an excellent avenue of free vole control, as vole activity on exposed lawn areas will be greatly reduced without the protection provided by the snow.



World Soil Day (WSD) is held annually on December 5th as a means to focus attention on the importance of healthy soil and advocating for the sustainable management of soil resources. An international day to celebrate Soil was recommended by the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) in 2002.

A soil test can provide information on the proper amount of lime and fertilizer to apply to your lawn, garden and other areas of your landscape. When gardeners apply only as much lime and fertilizer as is necessary and at the appropriate time, nutrient runoff into surface or ground water is minimized, money is saved, and plant health is optimized. Soil testing can also be used to diagnose common nutrient deficiencies for plants that are growing poorly. Virginia Cooperative Extension recommends that the soil be tested every three years.

- More than a third of garden samples tested by the Virginia Tech Soil Lab have too much lime, creating an alkaline soil that can cause micro-nutrient deficiencies in plants, yet many gardeners blindly add lime to their garden and lawn yearly.

So Don't Guess, Soil Test!

Soil testing is easy and simple. It can be done anytime the soil is workable. Kits are free, however, there is a fee for processing the test and postage to mail to the soil lab at Virginia Tech. In order to promote the practice of soil testing, the Henricopolis Soil and Water Conservation District has established a soil test incentive program to offset the cost of soil analysis for Henrico County residents.

Henricopolis will provide up to 2 coupons per household to cover the \$10.00 processing fee for a standard soil test (not including postage). People wishing to participate in this incentive program must request a soil test voucher. Vouchers are available by email or in-person at the Henricopolis SWCD office. Emails must include your name, physical address, and number of vouchers requested (maximum of 2 per household). Email requests to soiltestvouchers@henrico.us



Soil Test kits may be obtained from the Henrico Extension Office or at your local Henrico Library.

Educational Opportunities from the Henrico Extension Office

Growing Your Own Food Deep Run Rec Center, Tuesday, March 20; 7-8 PM. Growing your own food can be rewarding and healthy. Learn how to plan, plant and harvest a garden of any size. Program is free but registration is required; see information on the following webpage: <http://henrico.us/services/register-for-a-recreation-program/>.

Gardening for Butterflies Deep Run Rec Center, Wednesday, April 18; 7-8 PM. Everyone loves butterflies! Learn which plants attract butterflies to your garden and how to nourish the larval form of the butterfly. Program is free but registration is required; see information on the following webpage: <http://henrico.us/services/register-for-a-recreation-program/>

Master Gardener Clinics

Ask a Master Gardener your Gardening Questions at the following local events!

Richmond Home + Garden Show Richmond Raceway Complex
Friday, March 2: 11:00 am - 8:00 pm Saturday, March 3: 10:00 am - 8:00 pm Sunday, March 4: 10:00 am - 6:00 pm

Southern States 8718 West Broad Street
Saturdays from 9 am to 3 pm April 7 April 14 April 21 April 28

Horticulture Hotline

When plant, insect, and wildlife problems happen in the lawn or garden, who do you call?

A team of trained Master Gardeners are available to help answer gardening and pest questions, and solve problems using current research-based information.

By calling the helpline, you'll find yourself in contact with someone who will help identify the cause of your problem, or give an answer to your question using Virginia Tech and Virginia State University's experience and research knowledge. If the issue is addressed in one of our many factsheets it will be sent to you for your reference.

You can reach the Horticulture Helpline by calling: (804) 501-5160.

You can also submit questions online at <http://bit.ly/Henricoaskanexpert> . Make sure to select Henrico County in the appropriate drop down box.

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