

## Boxwood Blues

By Susan Camp

At the June Gloucester Master Gardener meeting, I was asked questions about several topics. I had to stumble my way through a couple of responses, but I promised myself to research every topic for future columns. In the near future, expect to read about harvesting herbs, getting rid of moles, and growing poppies.

Number one on my list of topics from the June meeting is boxwood blight. I mentioned boxwood blight in my last column on yaupon holly and winterberry, and I knew that I would need to cover this serious problem. Boxwood blight is a deadly fungal disease of susceptible cultivars of boxwood, including English boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa') and *Buxus sinica* var. *insularis* 'Justin Brouwers', a popular compact, rounded cultivar.

Boxwood blight is caused by the fungus *Calonectria pseudonaviculata*, first discovered in Britain in the early 1990's. By 1998 the fungus had spread to Europe and New Zealand. Boxwood blight was found in a Carroll County, Virginia nursery in 2011, having spread from a nursery in North Carolina.

Symptoms of boxwood blight include brown, dark-bordered leaf spots and black streaks on the stems, leading to defoliation and general plant dieback. The roots are not affected, so the plant can regenerate if the damage is minimal and a rigorous maintenance program with the appropriate fungicide is begun as soon as infection is noticed. If weakened by boxwood blight, shrubs become susceptible to other infections, including fungal root rot and *Volutella* blight, which causes plant dieback. Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) publication 3000-0000 provides basic information on boxwood blight. If you suspect that your boxwoods have been infected by boxwood blight, contact the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) or your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office. Plant specimens should be double-bagged in sealed plastic bags and submitted for examination to the Virginia Tech Plant Disease Clinic.

A Virginia Boxwood Blight Task Force was established to develop best practices for commercial growers, homeowners, and historical properties to prevent and treat this potentially devastating disease. The VCE publication "Best Management Practices for Boxwood Blight in the Virginia Home Landscape" presents specific guidelines for avoiding the introduction of boxwood blight into your garden and what to do if you discover that your shrubs have been infected. Two specific scenarios are covered in the publication: a lab-confirmed diagnosis in highly valued, susceptible boxwoods and a lab-confirmed diagnosis in less highly valued shrubs.

Basic guidelines for both scenarios are similar. Remove diseased shrubs and leaves, double-bag debris and dispose of it in the landfill. Do not compost diseased plant material. Sanitize tools, equipment, and personal clothing and shoes. Depending on the scenario, begin a fungicide-

spraying program for highly valued boxwoods or replace with new, more resistant plants. A table of boxwood cultivars, from highly susceptible to highly resistant is included in the publication, as is a table of appropriate fungicides. Tools and equipment should be sanitized using the household disinfectant concentrate o-Benzyl-p-chlorophenol (1.25 oz/gallon of water) or household bleach sodium hypochlorite (1 part bleach/9 parts water).

If the fungicide application program is undertaken, it will be time consuming. Diseased boxwoods must be monitored weekly during the growing season and sprayed at 7 to 14 day intervals. Unfortunately, there is no cure for boxwood blight. Spraying will help prevent further spread of disease, but will not eradicate disease that is already present. Further information is presented in the publication on preventing introduction of boxwood blight into the garden and landscape.

The Boxwood Blight Task Force has posted a Boxwood Blight Image Gallery on the website. Go to <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/> for color photos of affected plants. If you suspect that your boxwoods have been infected by boxwood blight, contact the Gloucester Extension Office at (804) 693-2602 to arrange a home visit by Tree Stewards.

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