Death stalks the forests and fairways of U.S.

By Mark Leslie

You look out in the forests, and it’s devastating,” Winged Foot Golf Club superintendent Bob Alonzi lamented after he lost his famous American elm tree to disease this winter. America’s golf courses — indeed, its forests — are under attack by diseases for which scientists nationwide are trying to discover cures and treatments. The “ash yellows” disease is killing white and green ash from Nova Scotia, Canada, to the Missouri River Valley. The dogwood anthracnose fungus has destroyed an estimated half of all the dogwoods in Pennsylvania and affected 9.5 million acres, primarily in the Appalachian Mountains from Virginia southward. And Dutch elm disease has made the United States a graveyard of American elm trees. These are the stories of the dogwood and ash trees, and the battle being waged in laboratories and in forests to save them.

Fungus rovages nation’s dogwood

“The carnage is unbelievable,” Virginia Tech’s Dr. R. Jay Stipes said of dogwood anthracnose fungus, which has ravaged populations of the native American flowering dogwood, Cornus florida. Stipes called the fungus vicious and voracious, adding that when it strikes, it causes lesions and large brown spots with purple borders on the leafs. It then spreads to branches and trunks, causing cankers and eventually killing the tree.

It is more prevalent at high elevations — areas where high disease pressure and conducive conditions are the highest. Dogwood trees are dying by the millions in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina, said Stipes, a plant pathologist at the Blacksburg, Va., campus.

“It’s our third Trojan horse,” he added, eluding to the fact that, like Dutch elm disease and chestnut blight, dogwood anthracnose came to America on imported trees — in this case, the Oriental dogwood, Cornus kousa.

“The dogwoods are about half dead in Pennsylvania,” said Stipes.

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Yellows disease destroys ash trees

Dr. Wayne Sinclair, Cornell University professor of plant pathology, said ash yellows has probably been around for 40 years, although the kind of organism that causes it was unknown as a group of plant pathogens until 1967.

“We only recently learned about diseases in that group because we haven’t had that much time,” he said. “Also, the symptoms of ash yellows are often subtle and, in most affected trees, not expressed well enough for diagnosis in the field.”

Very few people can recognize the disease. Diagnostic procedures involving laboratory work are usually necessary.

If an ash tree shows “die-back” of branches, there is some chance ash yellows is involved, Sinclair said. “In the Northeast, there is a good chance of that.”

White ash grows from Nova Scotia to the Great Lakes and south to Kentucky. Green ash has a much wider range: throughout the Eastern half of the United States and Eastern Canada. It is one of the major forest species in the inland portion of the Mississippi River delta.

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Tour of Duty

MARK ESODA
Atlanta Country Club
Marietta, Ga.
PGA’s BellSouth Classic
May 6-9, CBS

DOUG FISHER
TPC at Las Colinas
Irving, Texas
GTE Byron Nelson Classic
May 13-16, ABC

TIM LONG
Barton Creek Country Club
Austin, Texas
Srs. Liberty Mutual Legends of Golf
May 3-9, ABC

Esoda, 34, is in his fourth year at Atlanta CC. Previously he was a University of Georgia alumnus and spent time at several Peach State layouts, including Dunwoody Country Club, Hidden Hills CC in Stone Mountain and Ansley Golf Club in Atlanta. Ansley is a nine-hole city course that underwent extensive renovation during Esoda’s tenure.

Things to look for: No major renovations on the course proper have taken place in the past year. Esoda’s crew has concentrated on the periphery — mulching and landscaping back in the tree line. Everyone should notice a wet year we’ve had,” Esoda said. Last year saw precipitation levels 17 inches above normal. Standing water has resulted in shorter root growth

Fisher, 30, started his collegiate career as a forestry major. But a freshman internship at Castle Pine Golf Club/Castle Rock, Colo., under the tutelage of then-superintendent Phil Wycoff, convinced Fisher his future was in turf rather than trees. Since graduating with a four-year degree in landscape horticulture from Colorado State University, Fisher has worked as assistant superintendent at Castle Pines, Green Hills CC in Millbrae, Calif., and The Pincery CC in Parker, Colo. He came to Las Colinas two years ago as construction coordinator and is now in charge of the TPC course.

Things to look for: Water features are the main additions. Fisher said. A drainage ditch has been transformed into a waterfall

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HONORS DONORS
CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — The Honors Course has given $5,000 toward the new pesticide-exposure study being sponsored by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. The study will examine deaths among superintendents over the past 25 years to determine if there have been any unusually high rates of cancer or other diseases that could be linked to pesticide exposure.

HIERS MOVES ON
NAPLES, Fla. — Tim Hiers, CGCS, superintendent at John’s Island West Inc. in Vero Beach for eight years, has assumed the position of superintendent at Collier’s Reserve, a facility under construction here. Before working at the 54-hole John’s Island West, Hiers was at 36-hole Quail Ridge in Boynton Beach for years and Suntree in Melbourne for five years. He is a 1976 graduate of Lake City Community College. Collier’s Reserve is being designed by Art Hills and built by Central Florida Turf.

NTEP FIELD DAY SCHEDULED
BELTSVILLE, Md. — The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) will conduct a turfgrass research field day at its research plots at Beltsville Agricultural Research Center West on Aug. 5. The 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. program will include discussion and display of NTEP tests on Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, tall fescue, fineleaf fescue, bentgrass, Bermudagrass, buffalograss, zoysiagrass, and zoysiagrass/cold-season grass mixtures. Experts will also speak on wear tolerance, endophyte-enhanced grasses; low maintenance performance of tall fescue; Kentucky bluegrass and zoysiagrass; growth rates and management of tall fescue cultivars; organic fertilizer use on turfgrass; and other turfgrass topics.

ELM TREES AVAILABLE
HARRISVILLE, N.H. — Golf course superintendents may tap into the Elm Research Institute’s library of elm specimens by contacting the institute here. Superintendents nationwide may call 800-FORBLS, according to Assistant Director Yvonne Spalthoff. Participants buy 100 or more one- or two-foot saplings.

MAINTENANCE

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Growing Georgia GCSA expands scope of programs

To meet the demands of growing membership, the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association has expanded its programs.

In addition to the two Spray Technicians Seminars, held Feb. 15 and 22, a third is now set for June 28 at The Landings in Savannah.

Also new are two golf course construction tours — Maple Ridge Golf Club in Columbus, on May 3, and Oak Grove Island Golf Club in Brunswick on May 10. Both tours are sponsored by Mike Young Designs.

Add to the list the May 25 Member/Guest Golf Tournament at the Standard Club in Duluth, Ga.; the GCSA Superintendent/Ladies Golf Outing on June 14 at St. Ives Country Club, Duluth; and a golf outing at Green Island Country Club in Columbus, Ga.

The GCSA Summer Conference arrives Aug. 1-3, at the Augusta Raddison Hotel. Sunday night will find members touring the new golf course maintenance building at Augusta National Golf Club, in addition to treating their palate at a buffet barbecue afterward.

Monday, Aug. 2, features education, golf at West Lake Country Club and an evening riverboat cruise with a prime rib dinner. Tuesday brings the conference to a close with educational speakers.

Oct. 4 brings the Superintendent/Vendor Tournament at Great Waters in Greensboro, with the GCSA Annual Meeting Nov. 7-9, at Kiawah Island Resort in South Carolina. Golf will be held Sunday and Monday, with elections and education on Monday and Tuesday, Nov. 8 and 9.

For further information on these and other events, or for membership information, contact Karen White, executive director, at 706-709-4076.