Lilacs Have Some Problems
By Cynthia Ash
Assistant Extension Plant Pathologist
Minnesota Extension Service

Bacterial blight hit lilacs, especially white-flowered varieties, this spring with the cool wet conditions in May and could continue to spread under similar conditions. The blight resembles fireblight. Young succulent leaves and stems turn black and shrivel. Young shoots may be marked by a black strip or cankered (dead) areas.

Destroy diseased shoots by pruning with sterilized shears. Shears can be sterilized by dipping them for two seconds in a 10% bleach solution (nine parts water to one part household bleach) between cuts. Application of a copper fungicide as soon as the disease is detected has been found helpful. Copper fungicides can cause some leaf burn under certain conditions. Check the label for precautions. Avoid excessive fertilizer application including manure, and water only at the base of the plant. Thin older bushes to increase air circulation.

Powdery mildew is a common fungal disease on many plants including lilacs. A white to gray powdery fungal growth can be seen on the surface and/or bottom of the leaf. The disease seldom causes severe damage and can be kept at a minimum with pruning, and watering only at the base. During seasons when rainfall is plentiful and the humidity remains high, mildew will be more abundant and a fungicide such as sulfur or benomyl (Benlate) could be used to prevent new infections.

Verticillium Wilt Linked To Shade Trees Death
By Cynthia Ash
Assistant Extension Plant Pathologist
Minnesota Extension Service

Verticillium wilt is a fungal disease which interferes with the water conducting system in many shade trees including ash, maple, catalpa, cherry lilac and Russian olive. The fungus is present in the soil and enters the plant through roots. Verticillium wilt has acute and chronic phases. Acute symptoms include curling, dying, or abnormal red or yellow color leaf color, defoliation, wilting, dieback and sudden death of individual branches or entire trees. Trees or portions of trees may display these symptoms one year and appear healthy the next.

Chronic symptoms which may appear on certain limbs or the entire tree and include slow growth, sparse foliage, stunted leaves and twigs, leaf scorch, abnormally heavy seed crops and dieback.

The presence of the fungus in the xylem (water conducting tissues) results in a greenish to gray-brown discoloration of the xylem. This streaking may appear in the part of the tree displaying the acute or chronic symptoms but is more likely to be found farther down the tree in the trunk or larger limbs which support the symptomatic branches.

The severity of the infection is increased by adverse environmental conditions including water stress, high salt levels in the soil, transplant stress, poor soils and nutrient deficiencies. Care should be taken to alleviate or prevent these conditions. Trees resistant or immune to verticillium wilt should be used to replace trees lost to disease. Examples include gingko, juniper, larch, pine, spruce, apple, crabapple, mountain ash, birch, hackberry, hawthorn, linden, honeylocust, oak and poplar.

More information is available in a Minnesota Extension Service fact sheet, AG-FS-1164 entitled, Verticillium Wilt of Trees and Shrubs.