

## PINE WILT DISEASE CITED IN 14 COUNTIES

Pine wilt disease is killing off pine trees in Illinois, says James A. Fizzell, University of Illinois Horticulturist in Cook County. The disease is caused by the pinewood nematode, *Bursaphelenchus lignicolus*, and has been found in 14 counties, as far south as Massac County and as far north as DuPage and Winnebago counties. We suspect it is in other counties as well says Fizzell, but are still trying to confirm this.

Fizzell says the nematode was first found in Illinois near Collinsville in late 1979. Although there is no indication of an epidemic in Illinois or the United States, Fizzell feels the potential for significant damage does exist.

Pines are the only known host of the nematode, and in Illinois the disease appears to be most common in Scotch and Austrian pines. It essentially is limited to mature and nearly mature pines, which are attractive to the insect carriers.

The disease is spread through a relationship between the nematode and a beetle species not yet positively identified in the United States; but thought to be the Southern Pine Sawyer.

In Japan, where the disease has reached epidemic proportions in forests, it is known to be carried by a wood-boring sawyer beetle, *Monochamus alternatus*.

The infection process is cyclical, Fizzell explains. In June and July, adult beetles carrying nematodes emerge from dead trees. Together the beetles and nematodes infest healthy pines. The nematodes reproduce rapidly and destroy cells, killing the trees. The beetles lay eggs under the bark of dead wood in the summer. This is precisely where live nematodes that killed the tree are found in the greatest number. Beetle larvae and nematodes overwinter in the wood and emerge in the spring, with the beetles carrying the nematodes to healthy pines.

Species of affected pines with longer, softer needles show obvious wilt of needles over the entire tree, as if its moisture source had suddenly been cut off. The most obvious symptom is the sudden decline and death of the tree within a few weeks or months after the first sign of the disease has been noticed.

The only accurate way to identify the nematode is by microscopic examination, Fizzell says, and he advises sampling **only** when the entire tree dies suddenly and rapidly in one season.

For sampling, Fizzell recommends taking three or four trunk borings at chest height from a suspect tree. Wrap them in aluminum foil and place them in a tightly sealed plastic bag before mailing. For Scotch pine, a combination of trunk borings and branch sections is preferable. Make sure the branches are 6 to 8 inches long and taken from near the butt end of at least two opposing lower branches that still have their needles.

Samples from more than one tree must be bagged separately. Include information such as tree species, estimated age, type of planting and date symptoms developed. There is a \$12 charge for culturing; the check should be included with the sample. Address to: Plant Clinic, St. Mary's Road, Urbana, Ill. 61801.

Fizzell recommends two preventative measures. One is to keep living trees vigorous and pruned of dead branches. This makes the trees less attractive to the beetles. Also, burn or bury dead trees, immediately to prevent emergence of the beetles carrying the nematodes.

**James A. Fizzell**  
Senior Extension Adviser, Horticulture  
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