

Blight update August 6, 2013

Over the past several weeks I have been on the road a considerable amount of time at the OFA show in Columbus, Ohio, the PANTS show in Philadelphia, and visiting customers. During this time many people have asked me what is the latest on Boxwood Blight. So, here is what we know from this spring and summer!

The weather could not have been more conducive to make Boxwood Blight appear. It has been warm and rained in Piney River (and most of the Mid-Atlantic) about every other day. When it hasn't rained it has been overcast and threatened rain.

I have heard of several new instances where the blight has been found in recent weeks. I am not sure of how many states along the east coast, but I believe it has been found in every state from North Carolina to Connecticut.

Bennett, my brother who oversees our field boxwood production, just returned from Europe. He spent 10 days in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. He met with growers and researchers to talk about how they are managing Boxwood Blight. The bottom line is Boxwood Blight is something they are dealing with on a daily basis. They are learning to predict when optimum conditions will appear. They scout for symptoms and are spraying for control. In addition, there is extensive work in Europe to find more tolerant cultivars. Bennett is in the process of distilling all the information and we will begin sharing it soon.

Here at Saunders Brothers, we continue our work on several fronts:

- In the field and container operation we are continuing to use Best Management Practices (BMP's) to avoid the disease. But based on reports from US and European researchers and growers, Boxwood Blight will continue to spread, regardless of our best efforts. The Europeans say it is not an "if it appears" but a "when it appears" scenario. We believe that we are close to talking about Boxwood Blight as a managed disease, in the same way we talk about Phytophthora, Boxwood Leafminers, and Boxwood Psyllid. The good news is that the same Best Management Practices that help you avoid Boxwood Blight will minimize the spread of Boxwood Blight. Good air flow in and around plants, ample sunshine, and no overhead irrigation all discourage Boxwood Blight. Certain fungicides are very effective in controlling the disease, particularly when applied just before a prime infection period, which would be average temperatures in the 60's to 70's and complete wetting of the plant for an extended period.
- We are continuing to research new cultivars and look for varietal resistance. We believe it is important to the long term success of boxwood. We stopped bringing in new cultivars in the fall of 2011. We have continued to test many new cultivars we found prior to 2011, and recently we resumed taking in new plants through a process of steps that will help us determine if a plant is infected with Boxwood Blight. Asymptomatic plants will continue to be tested. Symptomatic plants will be destroyed as directed by our Boxwood Blight Compliance Agreement with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS).

- We continue to work with the researchers at NC State as they do varietal susceptibility trials. This spring we took a second load of plants to begin testing. The good news is that early tests show several of the varieties we have grown for years appear to have very good resistance to Boxwood Blight. 'Green Beauty', Insularis 'Nana', 'Golden Dream', 'Winter Gem', 'Dee Runk', 'Fastigiata', 'Green Gem', and 'John Baldwin' all show considerable resistance to the disease. 'Green Mountain' and 'Jim Stauffer' both show some resistance.

Official reports of Boxwood Blight are still limited, but we believe it may be more widespread than we know. While we continue to be diligent in using BMP's, it is important that we, as an industry, move toward preparing to manage the disease. We continue to work hard to provide you with the best plants possible, as well as the information to be successful with them.

To read previous updates please visit our website boxwood blight webpage.

<http://www.saundersbrothers.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/home.showpage/pageID/152/index.htm>

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