

Boxwood Holiday Greenery at Historic Sites

Homeowners and managers of historic properties should be made aware of the potential for the box blight pathogen, *Cylindrocladium pseudonaviculatum*, to be introduced to landscapes on infected boxwood greenery used for wreaths or holiday roping. Boxwood greenery (stems and leaves) that originated from boxwood plants infected with this pathogen has the potential to carry the pathogen into the landscape. The susceptibility of English and American boxwood to the box blight pathogen cannot be overemphasized. Severe defoliation occurs on these cultivars. Unfortunately, the disease has been found at several sites in Virginia, as well as surrounding states. If greenery originated from infected boxwood plants, the pathogen may produce spores on the greenery that could be spread to boxwood plants in the landscape. This possibility could have long-term repercussions for landscapes with historic boxwoods.

Some historic sites decorate with significant amounts of boxwood greenery over the holidays, increasing the potential for the pathogen to be introduced to landscape plantings. Although the fungal spores do not spread easily by air currents, they can potentially be carried on leaf debris adhering to people's shoes, on clothing or on tools used to trim greenery. Precautions should be taken when purchasing and installing greenery for the holidays and when discarding greenery after the holidays. If possible, homeowners and property managers should make sure to purchase boxwood greenery from reputable suppliers where box blight has not been found. Growers who have entered the Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Agreement follow strict best management practices along with routine inspections by the Virginia Department of Agriculture. When consumers purchase boxwood plants from a retail nursery or garden center, they should ask if plants have been purchased from a supplier in the Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program.

All incoming boxwood greenery should be inspected carefully for symptoms of the disease, including leaf spots, leaf browning, black streaks on stems, and leaf drop. (Refer to the images of box blight symptoms below.) Wreaths should be assembled away from any existing boxwoods in the landscape. Workers who directly handle greenery or boxwood plants should be educated about the disease. After the holidays, boxwood greenery should not be composted or discarded on-site. It should be bagged (preferably double-bagged) and removed to the landfill.

The importance of preventing introduction of this disease to landscapes with healthy boxwood plantings cannot be overemphasized. Please make sure that homeowners, growers, landscapers and property managers are made aware of this potential means of introducing the box blight disease.



Leaf spots



Black streaking on stems

Additional information about box blight can be found at the following web sites:

- <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/PPWS/PPWS-4/PPWS-4.html>
- http://www.ct.gov/caes/lib/caes/documents/publications/fact_sheets/plant_pathology_and_ecology/boxwood_blight-a_new_disease_for_connecticut_and_the_u.s._12-08-11.pdf
- <http://plantpath.cals.ncsu.edu/ornamentals>