

Plant Health Care Report

Scouting Report of The Morton Arboretum



THE
CHAMPION
of TREES

April 17, 2026

Issue 2026.2

For comments regarding PHCR, or to subscribe to email alerts regarding posting of new issues, contact Sharon Yiesla at syiesla@mortonarb.org.

Our report includes up-to-date disease and insect pest reports for northeastern Illinois. For disease and insect problems, contact the Plant Clinic via email at plantclinic@mortonarb.org or by phone 630-719-2424 (Monday through Friday, noon to 4 pm).

Quick View

What indicator plant is in bloom at the Arboretum?

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) (fig. 1) is in full flower. This is an indicator plant for crabgrass germination. It also indicates that it is time for the European pine sawfly to begin emerging (GDD 100-200)

Accumulated Growing Degree Days (Base 50) at The Morton Arboretum: 175 (as of April 16)

Insects/other pests

- Eastern tent caterpillar
- Spongy moth
- European pine sawfly
- Viburnum leaf beetle
- Spotted lanternfly

Diseases

- Pestalotiopsis on arborvitae
- Black knot

Weeds

- Garlic mustard
- Creeping bellflower

Miscellaneous

- Garden cleanup and native insects
- Boxwood blight or something else

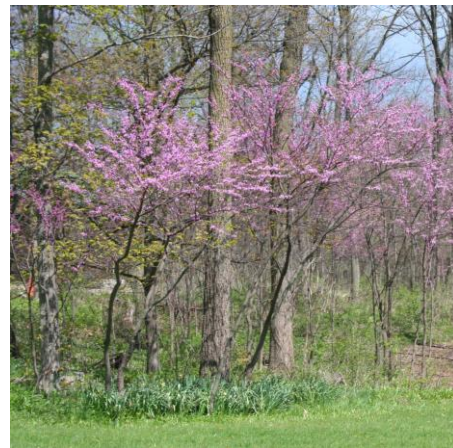


Figure 1 Redbud

Soil temperatures around Illinois (from Illinois State Water Survey)

This information will be provided all season. For data from other reporting stations, go to <https://warm.isws.illinois.edu/warm/soil/> (you will need to set up an account to access data.) Root growth occurs when soil temps are above 45 degrees (use deeper depth).

Max. Soil temps For 4/16/2026	St. Charles reporting station (north)	Champaign reporting station (central)	Carbondale reporting station (south)
2-inch, bare soil	82.4	75.5	80.6
4-inch, bare soil	72	73.5	74.7
4-inch, under sod	62.6	71.7	70.4
8-inch, under sod	60.2	66	68.3

* This is the maximum soil temperature recorded the day prior to publication of PHCR.

Seasonal precipitation

Seasonal precipitation (rain and melted snow) in inches.			
	2026	2025	Historical average (1937-2025)
Jan	2.33	.97	1.95
Feb	.14	1.3	1.79
Mar	5.22	4.59	2.57
April	3.56 (thru 4/16)	3.32 (full month)	3.66 (full month)
May			
June			
July			
Aug			
Sept			
Year to date	11.25 (thru 4/16)	10.18 (thru April)	9.97 (thru April)

Degree Days (current and compared to past years) and rainfall

The historical average (1937-2025) for this date at The Morton Arboretum is 2 GDD₅₀. The table below shows a comparison of GDD in different years. We are comparing the GDD₅₀ reported in this issue with the GDD reported in the first issue of last year, 2020 and 2014. These years were selected since publication dates of the first issue were within a day or two of each other. Lisle, Glencoe, and Waukegan (60085) were not used in 2015, so there is 'no report' from those stations.

Location	GDD as of 4/16/2026 Total	GDD as of 4/17/2025	GDD as of 4/16/2020	GDD as of 4/16/2015
Carbondale, IL*	563	303	190	233
Champaign, IL*	322	146	87	143
Chicago Botanic Garden**	158	56.7	No report	33.5
Glencoe*	52	11	7	No report
Chicago O'Hare*	177	89	56	79
Kankakee, IL*	229	88	67	95
Lisle, IL*	185	93	61	No report
The Morton Arboretum	175	53	40	31
Quincy, IL*	389	189	104	183
Rockford, IL*	150	62	37	51
Springfield, IL*	387	182	105	176
Waukegan, IL* (60087)	118	43	27	40
Waukegan, IL* (60085)	137	56	34	No report

*We obtain most of our degree day information from the GDD Tracker from Michigan State University web site. For additional locations and daily degree days, go to <https://gddtracker.msu.edu/>

**Thank you to Elizabeth Cullison, Chicago Botanic Garden, for supplying us with this information.

How serious is it?

Problems that can definitely compromise the health of the plant will be marked "serious". Problems that have the potential to be serious and which may warrant chemical control measures will be marked "potentially serious". Problems that are seldom serious enough for pesticide treatment will be marked "minor". "Aggressive" will be used for weeds that spread quickly and become a problem and "dangerous" for weeds that might pose a risk to humans.

Pest Updates: Insects

Examples of insects that may emerge soon in northern Illinois (based on growing degree days)			
GDD (base 50)	insect	Life stage present at this GDD	Type of damage
100 (possibly less)	Viburnum leaf beetle	Larvae (may be feeding when leaves are half expanded)	Chewing leaves
100-200	Elm flea weevil	Overwintering adults and larvae	Chewing leaves
100-200	Eastern tent caterpillar	Caterpillars	Chewing leaves
100-200	European Pine sawfly	Larvae	Chewing needles
145-200	Spongy moth	Caterpillars just hatching	Chewing leaves
100-200	Zimmerman pine moth	Larvae emerging from overwintering sites on trunk	Tunneling into bark
300-700	Oystershell scale	Crawlers emerging	Feeding on sap

Eastern tent caterpillar (minor to potentially serious, depending on population)

[Eastern tent caterpillar](#) (*Malacosoma americanum*) has not been spotted yet, but it is a pest that often starts to show up at GDD 100-200, so we will want to be looking for it very soon. When the caterpillars start to emerge, look for small tents beginning to form. They gather at a fork in a tree and build a web or “tent” (fig. 2), but at this point you may need to look carefully to spot it. The caterpillars will ultimately grow to two inches long and are hairy with white stripes down their backs and blue spots and yellow lines (fig. 3). These markings will not be as distinct on younger caterpillars. The caterpillars leave the web to feed during the day, but return at night. Severe defoliation only occurs when populations are high. Eastern tent caterpillars prefer trees in the rose family, such as wild black cherry, apple and crabapple, plum, and peach, but will also feed on birch, willow, maple, oak, and poplar.



Figure 2 Eastern tent caterpillar tent

Management: The most efficient method for managing the caterpillar is pruning out the nests. This should be done on cloudy or rainy days or at night when the caterpillars are in the nest and not out feeding.



Figure 3 Eastern tent caterpillar

Good website:

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/eastern-tent-caterpillar/>

Spongy moth (serious)

Spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar dispar*) caterpillars are serious defoliators that feed on over 300 species of trees and shrubs. The caterpillars begin to hatch between GDD 145 and 200. This is another pest that should be out fairly soon. Note that very early instar caterpillars (fig. 4) will not look the same as older caterpillars. As the caterpillars mature, they will develop 5 pairs of blue bumps, followed by 6 pairs of red bumps (fig. 5). Their favorite host trees include oak, crabapple, birch, linden, willow, and hawthorn. Although deciduous trees that are defoliated can put out a new set of leaves, the trees use a lot of resources to do so. Trees that suffer serious defoliation (greater than 50%) several years in a row may die. Severe defoliation also makes trees more susceptible to other problems. Needle-bearing conifers, including spruces and firs, cannot re-foliate and therefore may die after one season of attack.



Figure 4 Early instar spongy moth

Once active, the caterpillars will be feeding for a few weeks. They pupate mid-June into early July (GDD₅₀ 900-1200). Each insect pupates for about 10 to 14 days, generally emerging as adults in mid-July through mid-August. The adults will mate and lay eggs, then die.



Figure 5 Late instar spongy moth caterpillar

Management: *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk) can control young larvae, but is not as effective against more mature larvae. Treat while larvae are still relatively small. The first three instars remain in the tops of trees, so detection may be difficult. Mature larvae (fourth instar and later) feed at night and crawl down from tree tops to hide during the day in protected spots.

Good website:

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/spongy-moth/>

European pine sawfly (minor to potentially serious, depending on population)

Another pest to expect around GDD 100-200 is the European pine sawfly (*Neodiprion sertifer*). When the larvae come out, they will be very small at first. Look at the ends of branches, as the eggs were laid in last year's needles. If you can't find any larvae, check the needles for unopened eggs (fig. 6). This insect can cause heavy defoliation on red, Scots, mugo,



Figure 6 Eggs of European

Japanese red, and jack pines. European pine sawflies are interesting to watch. Groups of sawfly larvae rear up their heads simultaneously when disturbed, making the group appear to be one much larger organism (fig 7). This is a great defense mechanism. When fully grown, the sawflies will be about $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch long and will have several light and dark green stripes on each side of their bodies. Their heads and the three pairs of legs are black. Their mouths are so small after hatching that they can only eat one side of each needle, and therefore the chewed needles look like straw. Eventually as the insects mature, they are able to eat entire needles. The larvae feed on old conifer needles but are finished feeding before current year's needles emerge. They then drop down into the ground to pupate, emerging in September as adults to mate and lay eggs in the current year's needles.



Figure 7 European pine sawfly larvae

Management: Birds feed on the larvae, and rodents eat the pupae in the soil, but these predators are usually inadequate to control the larvae. Larvae can be removed by hand or washed off with a strong stream of water from the garden hose. They have no hooks on their feet like caterpillars do, so they can't hang on very well. Since European pine sawfly larvae are not caterpillars, *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (*Btk*) does not control them.

Good website:

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/european-pine-sawfly/>

Viburnum leaf beetle (potentially serious)

[Viburnum leaf beetle](#) (*Pyrrhalta viburni*) has been a common problem in the Chicago region for several years. We have not yet observed it feeding, but with the warmer weather, it is time to be looking. Its main hosts are arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*) and the American cranberrybush viburnum (*Viburnum opulus* var. *americanum*, formerly *V. trilobum*). Blackhaw viburnum (*Viburnum prunifolium*) is attacked, but the feeding is often less extensive. Viburnum species vary in their susceptibility (see [webpage](#) for more details). For recent research on resistance to VLB see [this paper](#) by Dr. Fredric Miller and Dr. Chad Rigsby.



Figure 8 Egg laying sites as seen in winter and early spring

This is a pest of concern because it is a serious defoliator of viburnums. Both the larvae and the adult beetle will feed on leaves, so we can see damage all season. The beetle overwinters as eggs in the tips of stems. The egg-laying damage occurs in rows. The eggs are laid in holes chewed by the adult female. The holes are then covered by a cap of chewed bark. These caps

are small, but are fairly easy to see as they are a slightly different color than the stem. Figure 8 shows the egg-laying sites in winter and spring before egg hatch. We may still have time to minimize populations by cutting out and destroying these egg-laying sites. You only have to cut out the infested twig tips, not the whole branch. If we can kill a large portion of the population before they hatch, management of this pest will be easier for the rest of the season.



Figure 9 Very young VLB larva below the penny

When the larvae do hatch, they are tiny. In fact, they are so small that they are easily overlooked. In figure 9, the little spot next to the penny is a very young viburnum leaf beetle larva. Be looking for them on leaves that are only about half open. The larvae can be found feeding between the veins and doing damage before the leaf has completely expanded. Figure 10 shows a leaf that is only partially expanded, but already being fed upon by newly hatched larvae.

The larvae, when larger, are easier to see (about 1/3 inch), may be pale green, pale orange or yellow. They do have a distinctive pattern of black spots along their sides and a row of black dashes running down their backs. At maturity, the larvae are a little less than half an inch long. The larvae chew on the undersides of foliage.



Figure 10 Very young VLB larvae feeding on half-expanded leaf

When mature, the larvae crawl down the stems to the ground, usually in mid-June, and pupate in the soil. Adults emerge from the soil around early July and also chew on the leaves. Their feeding damage forms irregular holes in the leaves. The beetles are about ¼ inch long and brown in color. On close inspection, golden hairs can be seen on the wing covers of the adult beetle. The adult beetles will be mating and laying eggs from summer into fall. There is one generation of the beetle each year. Heavy and repeated defoliation by the viburnum leaf beetle can lead to death of the shrubs.

Management: From October through April, twig tips with eggs in them can be pruned out and destroyed. This is the most effective way to reduce populations and minimize damage and is highly recommended. If the larvae can't hatch, they can't eat. Trim out only the last few inches of each twig where egg-laying sites are visible. You do not need to cut the whole stem. Insecticides can be used on the larvae from late April through June when they are feeding. [Michigan State University](#) suggests treating **larvae** with spinosad, insecticidal soap or chlorantraniliprole. To be effective, spinosad and insecticidal soap must be sprayed on the larvae, which are usually found on the undersides of the leaves. Chlorantraniliprole can be sprayed on the insect or on the plant. [Cornell University](#) also suggests a single soil application

of imidacloprid in spring to control **adults** this summer. Because imidacloprid is systemic, it can be translocated into the flowers and pose a hazard for pollinators. If previous damage warrants the use of this product, protect pollinators by applying imidacloprid immediately after flowering ends. Other insecticides can be used in summer when the beetles are out. Insecticidal soap is not effective against the adult beetles. If the larvae are successfully controlled in spring, there will be no adults to treat. The larvae do a lot of damage and are easy to kill, so it is worth attacking that stage of the life cycle.

If you plan to add new viburnums to the landscape, don't plant big groups (remember diversity is the way to go). Plant one or two, and this pest will be easier to manage.

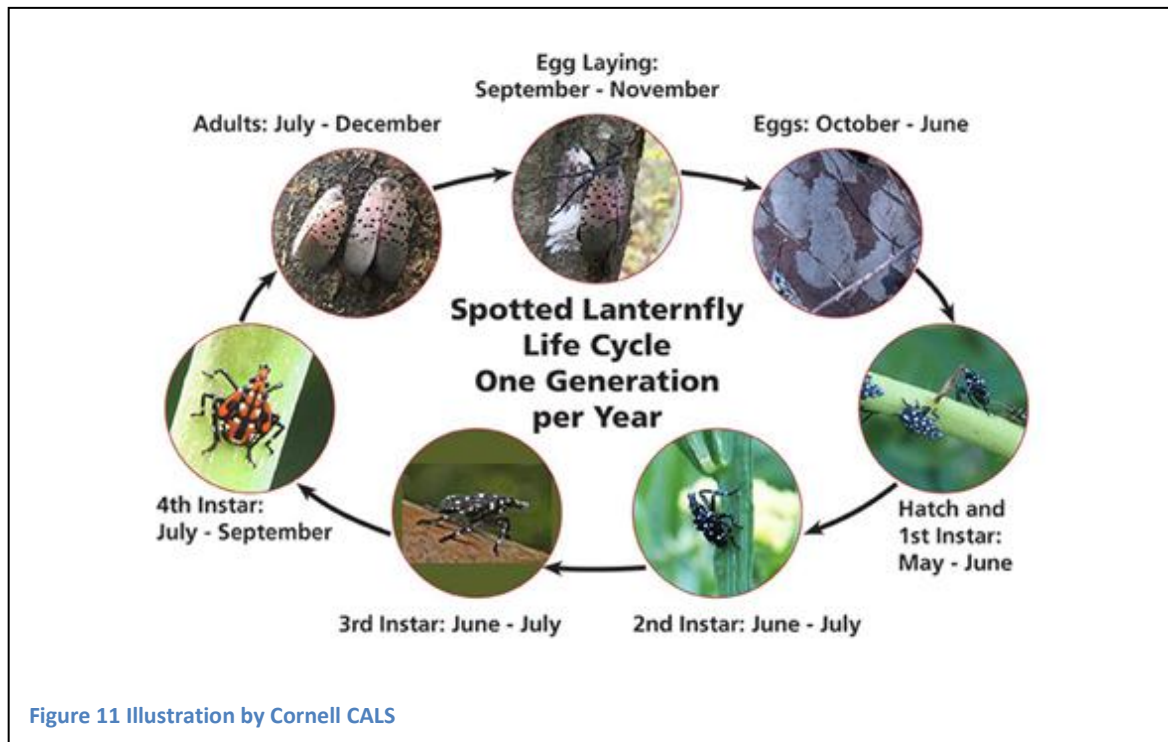
Good websites: <http://www.hort.cornell.edu/vlb/manage.html>
<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/viburnum-leaf-beetle/>
https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/keep_your_eyes_open_for_the_viburnum_leaf_beetles

Spotted lanternfly (Potentially serious/serious for growers; nuisance for outdoor recreation)

[Spotted lanternfly](#) (SLF) (*Lycorma delicatula*) has been a pest in Pennsylvania since 2014. Since that time, it has spread to other eastern states like New York, Maryland and Virginia. In the last year or two, there have been isolated reports of this pest in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. In late 2023, the pest was confirmed in limited locations in Chicago. We need to be alert to the possibility that it may be in other locations in our area and be watching for it.

SLF overwinters as egg masses (fig. 11). The female insect lays these non-descript looking egg masses on host plants, but also on hard surfaces, like bricks, wood pallets, and vehicles. The nymphs hatch out in spring and early summer. Newly hatched nymphs are white, but soon become black with white spots. Late stage instar nymphs will be red with white spots. The nymphs mature into adults beginning in mid-summer. The adult is not a true fly, but rather a planthopper. It is about one inch long. When at rest, the pinkish-gray wings are folded over the insect's back. The wings are marked by small black spots. In flight, the bright red hindwings can be seen. They are also marked with small black spots. The adults begin to lay egg masses in September and may continue to do so until a freeze. Nymphs hatch out over a period of time, so different instars may be present at the same time and late instar nymphs may be out as adults are emerging.

GDD are still a bit vague for spotted lanternfly, but NC State, partnering with USDA, has a website called SAFARIS. It has a modeling tool called [PestCAST](#), which forecasts the life stages of certain pests (including spotted lanternfly). It indicates the first nymphs could be out in the next few days.



The host range for SLF is large, more than 70 species. Preferred hosts include Tree of heaven, grapes, black walnut, hops and tuliptree. Other hosts include maple, willow, birch, and sycamore. This is a sap-feeding insect and it can feed very heavily on a host plant and weaken it. This is a major issue for grape producers. Like other sap-feeders, this insect will produce honeydew, which is a sticky substance. Spotted lanternfly differs from other sap-feeders in that it can produce extremely large amounts of honeydew. This can become a nuisance for any activity being conducted under infested trees. Sooty mold, a dark colored fungal problem, grows readily on the honeydew. The honeydew also attracts other insects like bees and wasps.

If you suspect spotted lanternfly in your area, take a photo and send a detailed email to: lanternfly@illinois.edu including when, where, and specifics of the location.

Good websites: <https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/spotted-lanternfly/>
<https://ilpestsurvey.inhs.illinois.edu/pest-information/most-unwanted/>
<https://agr.illinois.gov/insects/pests/spotted-lanternfly.html>
<https://cals.cornell.edu/new-york-state-integrated-pest-management/outreach-education/whats-bugging-you/spotted-lanternfly>

Pest Updates: Diseases

Pestalotiopsis on arborvitae (minor)

That's a tongue-twister fungus that we don't talk about every year. We did see it showing up in spring of 2025. This disease is showing up again on the lower portions of arborvitae this spring. The disease attacks injured or weakened foliage and causes it to turn yellow, then dark brown to almost black (Fig. 12). Symptoms start at the tips of the foliage and progress toward the leaf base. Damaged foliage is usually near the base of the plant where snow or mulch has accumulated, keeping moisture conditions high. We have not had a lot of snow cover for the last couple of years, which may be why we have seen less of the disease recently. Our arborvitae are stressed and that makes them more open to the disease. The recent heavy rains may have provided the moisture needed for the disease to develop.



Figure 12 *Pestalotiopsis* on arborvitae

Management: Most of the time, this is a minor disease and can be controlled by pruning out the damage as soon as you see it in the spring. In winter, do not allow snow to accumulate at the base of the plant for an extended period of time. Keep mulch away from the trunk.

Black knot (potentially serious)

[Black knot](#) (*Apiosporina morbosa*) is a serious and widespread problem of trees in the genus *Prunus*, especially plum and cherry trees. The Plant Clinic at The Morton Arboretum receives questions on this problem year-round since it is so prevalent and so easy to spot. Now is the time to look for new abnormal swellings on branches of cherry, peach, plum and related trees. The fungus overwinters in the hard, brittle, rough, black "knots" on twigs and branches of infected trees such as wild black cherries in the woods.



Figure 13 Black knot: old infection on left, newer infection in middle and new one developing on right (swelling of stem)

These knots may be small or may be several inches long and wrap around the branch. In some instances, the main trunk of the tree can become infected.

In the spring, the fungus produces spores within tiny fruiting bodies on the surface of these knots. The spores are ejected into the air after rainy periods and infect succulent green twigs of the current season's growth. The newly infected twigs and branches swell. The extensive

overgrowth of bark and wood is a response to hormones and produces the smaller swellings that we will soon be seeing. Frequently these swellings are not noticed the first year. The swellings become dormant in winter. But the following spring, velvety, green fungal growth will appear, and the knot increases in size. The knots darken and elongate during summer and, by fall, turn hard, brittle, rough and black (fig. 13). The black knots enlarge and can girdle the twig or branch, eventually killing it.

Management: This is a difficult disease to manage. Prune and discard all infected wood during late winter or early spring before growth starts and when new swellings appear. Pruning cuts should be made at least four inches below any swellings or knots. In advanced cases with many knots, pruning out branches may not be feasible as it may destroy the shape of the tree. Fungicides offer some protection against black knot, but are ineffective if pruning and sanitation are ignored. Fungicides are protective, not curative.

Good web site:

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/black-knot/>
<https://extension.umn.edu/plant-diseases/black-knot>

Pest Updates: Weeds

Garlic mustard (Invasive; this is classified as an Exotic weed in Illinois; other Midwestern states have legislated against it as well)

[Garlic mustard](#) is beginning to flower, so it is time to get a handle on it. If you don't know this plant, you should learn to recognize it. Many people mistake it for a wildflower and hesitate to get rid of it. This non-native, invasive weed can produce large quantities of seed, so we want to get rid of it before the flowers have time to set seed.

Garlic mustard is a biennial plant, meaning that it takes two growing seasons to complete its life cycle. In the first year, the plant will be a low-growing rosette of leaves. At this point the leaves are rounded to kidney-shaped with scalloped edges. The plant will overwinter in this rosette stage. In the second year, the plant will get taller (up to 3 feet tall). The leaves will be more triangular and more sharply toothed on the edge (fig. 14). When crushed, the leaves have a strong garlic smell. The flowers are white and have four petals in the shape of a cross. The fruit are very slender and contain numerous seeds.



Figure 14 Garlic mustard in flower

Management: Hand pulling can be effective in small infestations. Pull plants when they are small as it will be easier to remove the root. When pulling plants that are already in flower, remove them completely from the garden, as the flowers may still go on to produce seeds. Larger infestations may require herbicide treatments.

Good website: <https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/trees-and-plants/garlic-mustard/>
<https://extension.psu.edu/garlic-mustard>

Creeping bellflower (aggressive; considered a restricted invasive plant in Wisconsin)

For the last few years, we have been receiving reports of an annoying weed making itself known in flower gardens and lawns. Those complaints often come later in the season when this weed starts flowering, but leaves of this plant have been noted already this season. There are actually two plants that are nearly identical, ladybells (*Adenophora* spp.) and creeping bellflower (*Campunula rapunculoides*). The two plants differ only by a small structure within the flower. Ladybells and creeping bellflower are closely related, but on doing a little research, it seems that the creeping bellflower may be the 'bad seed' of this family. It is the one that seems to be overly aggressive. Unfortunately, because the plants are so identical, if a friend shared some ladybells with you from their garden, you may actually have creeping bellflower.



Figure 15 Leaves of creeping bellflower

Young plants have leaves that are heart-shaped to lance-shaped (fig. 15). This innocent looking plant has fleshy roots growing horizontally under the soil. These fleshy roots help to spread the plant and before you know it you have a healthy patch of them in your flower bed. If the plants are not removed, a flowering stalk with purple, nodding, bell shaped flowers will form (fig. 16).

Management: Small groups of plants can be removed manually through digging, but any roots left will continue to produce new plants. As new plants develop and are actively growing, spray them with a systemic weed killer that will be absorbed by the leaves and taken down to kill out the roots. Use with care, as many systemic weed killers are non-selective and will kill desirable plants if the product comes in direct contact with them.



Figure 16 Flowers of creeping bellflower

Good website: <https://extension.umn.edu/weeds/creeping-bellflower>

Miscellaneous:

Garden cleanup and native insects

This has become a very popular topic and it is a good one. Anything that helps native pollinators has some value. As with any topic, we want to delve a little deeper into this one so we understand it better. The current trend is to leave stems up in the garden to give bees a place to use as a 'nest' in which their young can develop. A good idea, but more needs to be considered. [This article](#) from Tufts University outlines the right way to do this. Stems may need to remain in the garden for two or even three years in order for the bees to benefit from them. This is important information that is not always talked about. In addition to that, the plants that benefit bees the most will either have hollow stems or a softer ('pithy') center. Not every plant provides that.

Keep in mind, that not all bees nest in stems and other pollinators may have completely different needs for their young. There are many species of ground bees that nest in the soil and will need access to bare ground. Other species of bees may need some type of cavity in which to build a nest.

As the season progresses, there will be other ways to benefit our pollinators.

Butterflies will need certain plants on which to lay their eggs. While many plants can provide nectar as a food source for adult butterflies, not all of them serve as a food source for the young caterpillars which will become butterflies. When looking for plants for a butterfly garden, it is good to find out which ones serve as a nectar source and which serve as a larval (caterpillar) food source.

Use of fungicides, insecticides and weed killers can have an impact on beneficial insects. If you need to treat for a problem, try to be conservative in terms of how much area you spray and when you spray. Look for lower toxicity products.

Many homeowners will have their property sprayed in summer to reduce mosquitoes. Some mosquito sprays are broad spectrum insecticides and can kill more than mosquitoes. Spraying when plants are in flower will pose a risk to bees. Do a little research before having your property treated.

It's exciting to see so many people turning to native plants these days. To help you learn even more, here are some resources to help you:

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/plants-that-attract-butterflies/>

<https://sites.tufts.edu/pollinators/2021/04/the-right-way-to-leave-stems-for-native-bees/>

<https://xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/nesting-resources>

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/garden-cleanup-for-pollinators-trim-perennial-stems-in-their-first-winter>

<https://blog.nwf.org/2020/09/what-you-need-to-know-before-spraying-for-mosquitoes/>

Boxwood blight (serious) or something else?

The Plant Clinic at The Morton Arboretum gets questions about boxwood blight every month of the year. Yes, boxwood blight is in northern Illinois and, in some areas, there is quite a bit of it, but not in all areas. The symptoms of boxwood blight can be confused with the symptoms of other boxwood problems. Leaf spots are a symptom of boxwood blight. But leaf miners can also cause leaf spots. Holding a leaf up to the light can reveal the insect larva inside, if the cause is really leaf miner. You can also cut open a spot with a razor or even a pin and, if you find an insect larva inside, the problem is leaf miner.

Another symptom of boxwood blight is quick decline of foliage leading to major defoliation. The leaves quickly turn yellow and fall off, generally starting at the bottom and moving upwards through the plant. In contrast to that, we often see boxwood branches that are dying from canker diseases. On these branches, all the leaves will turn tan on the diseased branch, but will stay attached to the branch for a long time.

Boxwood blight can also result in stem cankers. These cankers are along the stems and are long and narrow and very dark in color. Older boxwood stems will often develop elongated areas on the stem that are no longer green, but they are normal and usually tan or light brown in color. The canker diseases mentioned in the above paragraph often result in cracked or peeling bark, so they have a different appearance.

The bottom line here is that when a boxwood is doing poorly, it is wise to take some time and examine it carefully to determine the real cause of the decline. Boxwood blight is in the area, but we also have a number of other problems affecting boxwood. The first website link below takes you to a document from West Virginia University Extension that has good photos of boxwood blight and volutella canker (blight).

If you need some help sorting out the symptoms on your boxwood, you can call the Plant Clinic at The Morton Arboretum (630-719-2424) or email us photos taken at high resolution (plantclinic@mortonarb.org). The Morton Arboretum Plant Clinic CANNOT accept samples as it

is not a diagnostic lab. Samples should be sent to an approved lab. In Illinois that lab is the [University of Illinois Plant Clinic in Champaign-Urbana.](#)

Good websites: <https://extension.wvu.edu/lawn-gardening-pests/plant-disease/landscape-tree-disease/boxwood-blight>
<https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/bp/bp-203-w.pdf>



Bartlett Tree Experts, Presenting Sponsor of the Plant Clinic.

The Plant Health Care Report is prepared by Sharon Yiesla, M.S., Plant Knowledge Specialist and edited by Fredric Miller, Ph.D., Research Entomologist at The Morton Arboretum; and Juluia Lamb, Arboretum Volunteer. The information presented is believed to be accurate, but the authors provide no guarantee and will not be held liable for consequences of actions taken based on the information.

Thank you...I would like to thank all the staff and volunteers that report disease and pest problems when they find them. Your hard work is appreciated. Our volunteer scouts are Deb Link, Maureen Livingston, Loraine Miranda, Molly Neustadt and Moira Silverman.

Literature/website recommendations:

Indicator plants are chosen because of work done by Donald A. Orton, which is published in the book Coincide, The Orton System of Pest and Disease Management.

Additional information on growing degree days can be found at:

http://www.ipm.msu.edu/agriculture/christmas_trees/gdd_of_landscape_insects
http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000986_Rep2328.pdf

This report is available as a PDF at The Morton Arboretum website at <https://mortonarb.org/about-arboretum/plant-health-care-report/>

For pest and disease questions, please contact the Plant Clinic. You can contact the Plant Clinic via email at plantclinic@mortonarb.org . Emails will be answered during business hours Monday through Friday. You can call the Plant Clinic (630-719-2424) or visit in person, Monday thru Friday noon to 4 pm. Inquiries or comments about the PHCR should be directed to Sharon Yiesla at syiesla@mortonarb.org .

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2026 Plant Health Care Report Index



Following is an index of the various subjects in this year’s report. The number after each subject is the report number. For example, using the chart below, *Ficaria verna*..... 1 means that it was discussed in the PHCR 2026.01 or the newsletter dated April 3, 2026. The index is updated with the publication of each full issue and is included at the end of each full issue.

2026.1 April 3
2026.2 April 17

Black knot.....	2	Garlic mustard	2
Boxwood blight or something else	2	Indicator plants, what they tell us.....	1
Crabgrass preventer	1	Pestalotiopsis on arborvitae.....	2
Creeping bellflower.....	2	Scale, magnolia	1
Eastern tent caterpillar	2	Spongy moth.....	2
Egg masses and more	1	Spotted lanternfly.....	2
European pine sawfly.....	2	Tools you can use	1
<i>Ficaria verna</i>	1	Using growing degree days.....	1
Fungicides, timing	1	Viburnum leaf beetle.....	2
Garden cleanup and native plants	2	Weather, climate and water.....	1