

Plant Health Care Report

Scouting Report of The Morton Arboretum



THE
CHAMPION
of TREES

May 15, 2026

Issue 2026.4

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?

Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is starting to flower (fig. 1)

Accumulated Growing Degree Days (Base 50) at The Morton Arboretum: 300.5 (as of May 14)

Insects/other pests

- Update on boxwood leafminer
- Euonymus scale
- Oystershell scale
- Woolly aphids
- Azalea lace bug
- Galls, part 1

Diseases

- Powdery mildew on ninebark
- Peach leaf curl

Weeds

- Bishop's weed
- Cleavers

Miscellaneous

- Is your ginkgo or hosta brown? (Frost/freeze damage)



Figure 1 Black locust (photo: John Hagstrom)

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.)

Max. Soil temps For 5/14/2026	St. Charles reporting station (north)	Champaign reporting station (central)	Carbondale reporting station (south)
2-inch, bare soil	77	85.9	82.2
4-inch, bare soil	68	80.7	75.2
4-inch, under sod	59.5	72.7	72
8-inch, under sod	57.8	65.8	69.3

* 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	5.32	3.32	3.66
May	.77 (thru 5/14)	1.86 (full month)	4.14 (full month)
June			
July			
Aug			
Sept			
Year to date	13.78 (thru 5/14)	12.04 (thru May)	14.10 (thru May)

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

The historical average (1937-2025) for this date at The Morton Arboretum is 150 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 5/14/2026	GDD as of 5/15/2025	GDD as of 5/14/2020	GDD as of 5/14/2015
Carbondale, IL*	892	730	390	568
Champaign, IL*	541	500	191	424
Chicago Botanic Garden**	No report	231	No report	151.5
Glencoe*	105	79	27	No report
Chicago O'Hare*	331	342	125	258
Kankakee, IL*	396	360	142	313
Lisle, IL*	347	361	135	No report
The Morton Arboretum	300.5	250	121.5	193.5
Quincy, IL*	655	558	263	504
Rockford, IL*	311	317	103	203
Springfield, IL*	649	541	235	484
Waukegan, IL* (60087)	230	203	64	164
Waukegan, IL* (60085)	262	250	80	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
300-700	Oystershell scale	Crawlers emerging	Feeding on sap
400-600	Bronze birch borer	Larvae hatching out and beginning to enter bark	Tunneling under bark
400-500	Pine needle scale	Crawlers emerging	Feeding on sap
500-700	Euonymus scale	Crawlers emerging	Feeding on sap
500-600	Viburnum crown borer	Caterpillars hatching and entering bark	Tunnel under bark
700-800	Bagworm	Caterpillars emerging	Chewing foliage

Update on boxwood leafminer: One of our scouts has spotted the orange, mosquito-like adults of the boxwood leafminer. They seem to be out a little earlier than expected.

Euonymus scale... (potentially serious)

Euonymus scale (*Unaspis euonymi*) is one of those insects that we can find all year round. Right now, we are seeing the overwintering adults. Even though we see the adults all season, the young crawlers are out and active for only a short time (and it will soon be time to look for them). Many insecticide treatments are targeted at the crawlers when they emerge, which is generally around the early part of June (GDD 500-700). That may come a little earlier this year, with temperatures starting to rise again. The crawlers are a pale, yellow-orange. Male adult scales are white, and the females are brown (fig. 2) and oystershell-shaped. Euonymus scale overwinters as fertilized females on plant stems. They do not produce honeydew.



Figure 2 Euonymus scale adults, Male (white) and female (brown)

Management: On smaller plants, like groundcover euonymus and pachysandra, heavily infested branches may be pruned out to reduce the population. Sprays of insecticide are commonly targeted at the young (crawler stage) of the scale. Not all systemic products are effective against armored scale species. Armored scale do not feed in the vascular system where some systemic insecticides end up. Systemic insecticides are most useful and effective on armored scale species that feed on the foliage because they burst plant cells and extract

their content. In contrast, armored scale species that feed only on branches, twigs, and trunks of woody plants avoid direct exposure to systemic insecticides. (Sadof and Neal 1993).

Good website:

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/euonymus-scale/>

... and oystershell scale (potentially serious)

Speaking of scale insects that are shaped like oyster shells, that brings us to, you guessed it, oystershell scale (*Lepidosaphes ulmi*). On plants like pachysandra, it may be possible to have both oystershell and euonymus scale at the same time. They can be hard to tell apart. Both scales do have the overall shape of an oyster shell, but the female euonymus scale often tends to be more pear-shaped and a bit flattened. The male euonymus scale is white and elongated. The oystershell scale is closer to really looking like an oyster shell and is usually more convex. There may be some banding on oystershell scale, but it is not always obvious. Like euonymus scale, oystershell scale does not produce honeydew.



Figure 3 Heavy population of oystershell scale

This scale has a wide host range, and we did see it on some trees and shrubs last year, as well as on pachysandra. Populations can get very dense, sometimes to the point where the bark of a tree branch cannot be seen (fig. 3).

Oystershell scale overwinters as eggs under the female's protective cover. The crawlers emerge just slightly earlier (GDD 300) than those of euonymus scale (GDD 500). Be looking now and if using sprays for crawlers, the time to apply is at hand.

Management: With the emergence of both crawlers so close to one another, it may not matter if you are sure which scale you have on pachysandra, or if you have both. When you spray for one, you may catch both, if you time it right. Careful scouting of plants will be important. Start looking for crawlers around that GDD 300 mark. Like euonymus scale, oystershell scale is also one of the armored scales and not all systemics are effective (see above).

Good website:

<https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/oystershell-scale/>

Woolly aphids (minor)

Most people are familiar with aphids, but may not know their fuzzy cousins, the woolly aphids.

Woolly birch aphids, also known as spiny witch-hazel gall aphid has already been reported this year. Woolly beech aphids have been fairly common in recent years, but we don't yet have a report on them being out. Both these insects look a lot like regular aphids, except they dress themselves up with a little bit of white fluff. Like regular aphids, they are sap feeders and produce honeydew.



Figure 4 Woolly beech aphids

The woolly beech aphid (*Phyllaphis fagi*) (fig. 4) feeds only on European beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*). It seldom does any real damage. It can become a nuisance when populations are high, due to the mess of the honeydew it produces.

The woolly birch aphid (*Hamamelistes spinosus*), however, has two hosts, birch (*Betula* spp.) and witch-hazel (*Hamamelis* spp.). The insect overwinters on the bark of a birch tree. When spring comes, the female will give birth to live young on the undersides of new leaves (fig. 5). The feeding of the woolly birch aphid causes the leaf to take on a corrugated look at first. Later, the feeding will lead to curling of the leaves, with most of the insects tucked into the lower side of the leaf protected by the curling of the leaf.



Figure 5 Woolly birch aphid on lower side of leaf

In late June, the aphids will go to their other host, witch-hazel. They will lay eggs on the twigs, and these eggs will overwinter on the witch-hazel. The eggs will hatch, and the feeding caused by this generation of aphids will lead to the formation of a spiny gall on the stem.

The female produces a number of aphids in the gall, and then she leaves the gall to fly to the birch.

Management: Both of these woolly aphids are fairly minor pests. They can often be washed off the plant with a strong stream of water from the garden hose. Insecticides would not be needed, unless a very high population of insects develops.

Good websites: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/spiny-witchhazel-gall-aphid>
<https://bygl.osu.edu/index.php/node/2143>

Azalea lace bug (minor to potentially serious)

Plant Clinic is starting to get reports of damage from the azalea lace bug (*Stephanitis pyrioides*). We are starting to see this pest on a more regular basis than in the past. Azaleas are being used more in the landscape, and our changing climate may be more favorable to this pest. These factors are likely contributing to the more regular appearance. While we usually think of lace bugs as a minor pest, this particular species can be serious when the populations are high.

This pest overwinters as eggs on evergreen azaleas. The nymphs hatch in spring. More than one generation will occur over the growing season. It is not unusual to find more than one stage infesting a plant at one time. The insect feeds in both the nymph and adult stages. The adult has very lacy wings (fig. 6), thus the name. Azalea lace bug has piercing/sucking mouth parts, and sucks sap from leaves, resulting in stippling (fig. 7). A serious infestation will cause leaves to appear white, dry up, and fall off the plant. The damage can be confused with mite damage, but looking at the underside of the leaves reveal clues that point to the azalea lace bug. Lace bugs leave behind shiny black spots of excrement. Nymphs, adults and cast-off skins can also be found on the undersides of the leaves.

Management: Avoid planting azaleas and rhododendrons in sunny sites. This stresses the plant and can lead to larger populations of the pest. Insecticide sprays can be used and will be most effective when nymphs are present. Systemic insecticides can also be used. Timely treatment can prevent heavy damage to leaves.



Figure 6 Adult azalea lace bug



Figure 7 Stippling caused by azalea lace bug

Galls, part 1

Galls are starting to show up on some of our favorite plants. The vast majority of galls are harmless, but they are included here so you can learn to recognize them in the landscape. No control measures are needed.

Our first contestant of the year is one of the interesting looking ones. Elms are showing off the elm sack gall. The elm sack gall sticks up from the upper leaf surface like a little pouch (fig. 8). The sample we saw was red in color. Sack galls are caused by different species of aphid.



Figure 8 Elm sack gall

Witch-hazel cone gall is showing up on witch-hazel (thus the name!). Witch-hazel cone gall is caused by an aphid. The gall does indeed look like a pointy little cone (fig. 9) emerging from the upper surface of the leaf.



Figure 9 Witch-hazel cone gall

As I started to list galls that were being reported to me, I had to wonder where our old friend the maple bladder gall was. And then one of the Plant Clinic volunteers texted me to report that she had found them. Maple bladder gall is a common problem on red maple (*Acer rubrum*), silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) and the



Figure 10 Maple bladder gall

hybrid between the two, Freeman's maple (*Acer x freemanii*). We see this gall almost every year. It starts out as a small green bead and then changes to red (fig. 10) and later in the season almost black. We are seeing it in the red stage already. They are caused by eriophyid mites that overwinter in bark crevices and around callous growth of wounds, scars, and pruned branches.

Pest Updates: Diseases

Powdery mildew on ninebark (minor to potentially serious)

Powdery mildew has been found on the leaves of ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*). The straight species of ninebark is relatively resistant to powdery mildew, but some of the cultivars can be very susceptible and can sustain quite a bit of damage. Research has been done on this. Go to this [link](#) to see the findings. Hundreds of plant species are susceptible to powdery mildew, but the disease is caused by many different species of fungi which are host specific. This means that the powdery mildew on coralberry will not infect lilacs and so forth.



Figure 11 Powdery mildew on ninebark

Powdery mildew appears as a superficial white to gray coating over leaf surfaces, stems, flowers, or fruits of affected plants. Initially, circular powdery white spots appear. These spots coalesce producing a continuous patch of “mildew.” On ninebark, the leaves at the tips of branches often develop a thick coating of white powder (fig. 11), while other parts of the same plant may show very few symptoms. Later in the season, fungal fruiting bodies that look like black pepper under a hand lens will appear. Warm days and cool nights favor this fungal disease. The fungi that cause powdery mildew are deterred by water since spores will not germinate on wet leaves. However, the fungus still needs high humidity to infect the plant. Although unsightly, powdery mildew is usually not fatal in the landscape.

Management: Infected plant parts should be removed as soon as symptoms appear. Dispose of fallen leaves. Water plants during periods of drought to keep them healthy. Put plants in locations where there is good soil drainage and sufficient sunlight. Provide proper plant spacing for good air circulation. In the future, plant mildew-resistant cultivars and species.

Good website: <https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/powdery-mildews/>

Peach leaf curl (potentially serious)

Peach leaf curl is caused by the fungus *Taphrina deformans*. It is related to the fungus that causes oak leaf blister. Hosts are peach and nectarine (*Prunus* spp.). This fungal disease is most severe when cool, wet weather is prevalent at the same time new leaves are emerging. This describes quite a bit of our spring. The Plant Clinic at The Morton Arboretum has received several reports of a peach leaf curl. Young, succulent leaves become puckered and deformed as they develop. The puckered areas turn yellow, pink and red (fig. 12). Later, as spores are produced, the leaf surfaces will turn gray or have a powdery appearance. Eventually, the leaves turn yellow and fall off. Peach leaf curl generally does not kill the tree, but annual infections may weaken a tree and predispose it to other problems.



Figure 12 Peach leaf curl

Management: The fungus overwinters in buds. Fungicides are only effective when applied in fall after leaf drop or in spring before bud swell. Once the leaves have emerged, fungicides are no longer effective.

Good websites:

<http://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-and-plant-advice/help-diseases/peach-leaf-curl>

<https://extension.psu.edu/peach-disease-peach-leaf-curl>

Pest Updates: Weeds

Bishop's weed (aggressive)

For many years, Bishop's weed (*Aegopodium podagraria*) was sold as a ground cover. It was also sold under the name goutweed and ground elder. The variegated cultivar (fig. 13) was especially popular. But times change, and the biggest question that the Plant Clinic gets regarding this plant is "How do I get rid of this?"

Why the change? Bishop's weed is a strong grower and is very aggressive, often covering a lot more territory than is desirable. This plant spreads easily

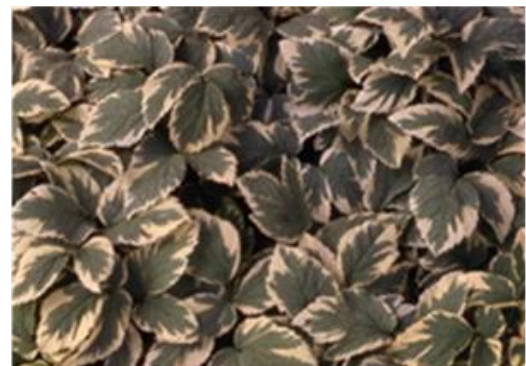


Figure 13 variegated Bishop's weed

underground and can be difficult to manage. At this time, Wisconsin is the only Midwestern state that legislates against this plant. That does not mean it is a problem only in that state. It may not fall into the invasive category, but it certainly is aggressive in many gardens.

The leaves of Bishop's weed are compound with up to nine leaflets (fig. 14). The arrangement of the leaves often leads people to mistake it for poison ivy. Leaves of the species are green, but the variegated cultivar has green leaves with creamy margins. The plants will produce clusters of white flowers that resemble Queen Anne's lace, followed by lots of seeds!

Management: Bishop's weed can be difficult to manage. Remove flowers before they go to seed to minimize spread. Control of existing plants is difficult without herbicides because digging the plant seldom removes all the underground stolons. Systemic herbicides can be used to control this plant, but multiple applications may be needed. It is best to treat the plant when it is small, either at the time it is emerging from the soil or resprouting after being cut down. The weed killer will be absorbed by the young leaves and transported down to the root system to kill out the entire plant. These are non-selective herbicides and can kill or damage desirable plants.



Figure 14 Bishop's weed in flower

Cleavers (bedstraw) (aggressive)

A busy weed called bedstraw or cleavers (*Galium aparine*) is showing up in yards. This annual weed has tiny white flowers and a slightly sticky surface. It is related to the ground cover sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*) but not nearly as welcome. Cleavers (fig. 15) is presently flowering and starting to go to seed. Because the plant is slightly sticky and the stem breaks off very readily, it is easy for this plant to get stuck to animals (and gardeners) and this helps to spread the seeds.



Figure 15 Cleavers (photo: S. Yiesla)

Management: Since this is an annual weed, chemical control is not warranted. The stem breaks easily, so pulling the plant out of the garden may be the best bet. You won't get the root, but with an annual you don't really need to. This plant needs to be pulled now before the seeds are fully ripe.

Is your ginkgo (or hosta) brown? (Frost/freeze damage)

We had weird temperature swings this year and many plants flowered and leafed out a bit early. Then we had a freeze in the wee hours of May 2nd. Since that time, the Plant Clinic at The Morton Arboretum has received numerous reports of trees and perennials with brown leaves. Many trees, including redbud, ginkgo, magnolia and Japanese maples, have been affected. Some perennials were damaged a little, with hostas seemingly taking the lead in damage.



Figure 16 Hosta leaves damaged by freeze

The temperatures that early morning got in the 20's in many parts of the region. At that time, some trees had very small leaves just beginning to emerge and the cold temperatures killed them. Ginkgo and Japanese maple have shown a lot of damage. Redbuds are also showing damage, but some redbuds whose leaves were further along in their development came through just fine. Leaves do toughen up a little as they age. The perennial garden was not spared and some perennials just coming out of the ground got hit as well. Hostas seem to have been particularly hard hit, even though their leaves were well expanded. We have had many reports of hostas with leaves that look sun damaged (fig. 16). Cold damage can look like that.

While this looks devastating, all is not lost. The freeze killed leaves, but in most cases, did not kill the plant. Many trees and perennials are able to produce a new set of leaves, but the process will not happen overnight. We have to be patient. This is a watch and wait situation. Let nature take its course. We recommend against fertilizing these damaged plants. In this situation, fertilizer may add more stress. On perennial plants you can cut away the dead leaves, but that may be difficult to do on trees. Trees are probably best left alone for now. If the weather turns dry, it will be important to provide supplemental water to help these plants produce new leaves.



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



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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.

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