Plant Health Care Report

Scouting Report of The Morton Arboretum

May 29, 2026 **Issue 2026.5**

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?

Japanese tree lilac (*Syringa reticulata*) is beginning to flower (fig. 1). In the early stages of flowering (500-700 GDD), this indicator plant tells us it is time to look for the crawlers of Euonymus scale. In late flower (700-800 GDD), it indicates that bagworm larvae may be hatching.

Accumulated Growing Degree Days (Base 50) at The Morton Arboretum: 516 (as of May 28)

Insects/other pests

- Bagworm
- Spittlebug
- Four-lined plant bug
- Euonymus webworm
- Sawflies
- Roseslug sawfly
- Rose plume moth caterpillar
- Galls, part 2

Diseases

- Cedar-rusts on deciduous hosts
- Rust on buckthorn

Weeds

- Pokeweed

Figure 1 Japanese tree lilac (Photo: S. Yiesla)

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 5/28/2026	St. Charles reporting station (north)	Champaign reporting station (central)	Carbondale reporting station (south)
2-inch, bare soil	88.4	92.3	90.4
4-inch, bare soil	81.9	88.2	84.3
4-inch, under sod	77	80.8	78.5
8-inch, under sod	70.8	73.3	75.5

* 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	1.78 (thru 5/28)	1.86 (full month)	4.14 (full month)
June			
July			
Aug			
Sept			
Year to date	14.79 (thru 5/28)	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 321 $GDD_{50.}$ The table below shows a comparison of GDD in different years. We are comparing the GDD_{50} 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 5/28/2026	GDD as of 5/29/2025	GDD as of 5/28/2020	GDD as of 5/28/2015
Carbondale, IL*	1185	965	664	826
Champaign, IL*	796	677	440	678
Chicago Botanic Garden**	No report	No report	282.5	305
Glencoe*	221	114	141	No report
Chicago O'Hare*	568	439	353	483
Kankakee, IL*	641	478	383	540
Lisle, IL*	589	465	372	No report
The Morton Arboretum	516	340.5	355	377.5
Quincy, IL*	915	738	501	733
Rockford, IL*	550	418	317	382
Springfield, IL*	915	722	485	734
Waukegan, IL* (60087)	424	273	251	345
Waukegan, IL* (60085)	475	329	280	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
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
900-1200	Japanese beetle	adults	Chewing foliage; mating and laying eggs
Possibly 1200-1300	Viburnum leaf beetles	Adults emerging	Chewing on leaves
1200-1800	Fall webworm	Caterpillars feeding, but webbing not seen yet	Chewing on leaves

Bagworm (potentially serious)

We are watching for bagworm (*Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis*), but so far, have no confirmed reports. This insect may be emerging very soon, but it can be overlooked because, in the early stage of its life, it would be very, very small. It might look like a tiny ice cream cone (fig. 2) that has been dropped. We need to catch them in the early stage of life, if insecticides are to be used. Now is the time to be scouting. This pest is often on evergreen trees and shrubs, but does not feed on them exclusively. They are also known to attack a variety of deciduous trees.

Figure 2 Very young bagworm

Bagworms overwinter as eggs inside the female bag. The bag can contain between 300 and 1,000 eggs. The eggs hatch in early summer, and the young larvae suspend from a silk string and are often "ballooned" by wind to nearby plants. When a suitable host plant is found, larvae begin to form bags over their bodies. The tiny cone-shaped bags are constructed from silk and camouflaged with bits of twigs and foliage from the host plant. Larvae stick their heads and front legs out of the top of the bags to feed and move (fig. 3). The feeding by young larvae results in holes in the foliage of deciduous plants and loss of needles on evergreens. As the larvae grow, they enlarge their bags and feed on the entire leaf, leaving only veins. They move to a sturdy branch, attach the bag (fig. 4) with a strong band of silk, and then pupate. By August the larvae have matured

Figure 3 Bagworm larva peeking out of bag

and are 1 to 1-1/2 inches in length, and their completed bags are 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 inches long. About four weeks later, adult males emerge and mate with the sedentary females. The female, which has no eyes, wings, legs, antennae, or functional mouthparts, lays eggs and is then mummified around the egg mass within the bag.

Figure 4 Bagworm bag

Bagworm populations can build rapidly and quickly defoliate their hosts. Healthy deciduous trees can usually tolerate consecutive years of severe defoliation before they are killed. Evergreen trees, on the other hand, can be killed by just one year of severe defoliation. Bagworm larvae feed on over 120 species of trees and shrubs. Their bags are made of the foliage they're feeding on, so a bagworm feeding on pine will have pine needles in its bag, while a bagworm feeding on an oak tree will have pieces of oak leaves decorating its bag.

Management: The tiny larvae may be hatching very soon and when the early stage caterpillars are out, insecticides can be very effective. Once the larvae stop moving around and attach the bag to the stem, they are safe from insecticides. Handpicking bags from that time until early spring will help control populations for next year. If they can't hatch, they can't feed, so this is more effective than people think. Remove as many of the bags as possible later in the season.

Good websites:
https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/bagworms/#overview

Spittlebugs (minor)

Spittlebug is showing up on several weeds and perennials. They can be identified by the frothy white mass they produce on foliage and twigs. It does look quite a bit like spit (fig. 5). The tiny insect is in the middle of the spit. Spittlebugs suck plant sap but inflict little damage on mature plants. There are a number of species of spittlebugs that feed on a variety of plants.

Figure 5 Spittlebug

Management: Control is rarely necessary, and hosing the plants down forcefully with water is usually sufficient to remove most of the insects. This may need to be repeated a few times.

Good website: https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-insects/spittlebugs

Four-lined plant bug (minor)

Figure 6 Damage caused by four-lined plant bug

Be looking for the four-lined plant bug (*Poecilocapsus lineatus*). We have seen feeding damage on a number of perennials already. This insect feeds on 250 species, including many kinds of perennials, vegetables, and shrubs. Feeding injury is frequently mistaken for a fungal leaf spot disease. Four-lined plant bugs have piercing, sucking mouthparts which they use to break plant cells and then flush the feeding wound with digestive juices. Damage appears as dark leaf spots (fig. 6) which subsequently turn translucent. Both nymphs and adults feed on leaves.

Figure 7 Nymph

Nymphs are red (fig. 7) and will develop dark wing pads as they mature. The adult stage is 1/4" to 1/3" long and has four black lines (fig. 8) running the length of the yellow or green wings, thus the name. It's quite a shy insect that scurries away when you try to find it. The insect overwinters as eggs laid in slits cut into plant shoots. There is one generation per year.

Management: Some people try to hand-pick these insects, but their timidity makes them difficult to catch. Small populations don't generally need to be controlled. Cutting down infested stems of the host plant at the end of the season may reduce the number of eggs that overwinter and thus reduce the population that can attack plants next spring.

Figure 8 Adult

Good website: https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-insects/four-lined-plant-bugs

Euonymus webworm (severity is determined by the amount of defoliation)

Euonymus caterpillars (*Yponomeuta cagnagella*), also known as euonymus webworms for the webbing they make, are feeding on euonymus shrubs (*Euonymus* species). Last week, our scout found a good amount of webbing with a number of the caterpillars inside. Euonymus caterpillar can attack various species of euonymus including spindle tree (*E. europaeus*) and burning bush (*E. alatus*). Inspect your plants carefully.

Figure 9 Euonymus webworms

These caterpillars are leaf-feeding insects that live in colonies within thin webs at branch ends. The web increases with size as the larvae feed on the leaves and continue to grow. Larvae are pale yellow with black spots (fig.9), eventually reaching an inch at maturity. The larvae will pupate in cocoons that hang on the branches. The adult moth emerges in June. The moth, known as an ermine moth, is white with black spots.

Management: Small populations can be managed by pruning out webs now and destroying them. *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (*Btk*) will control young larvae. This is the value of scouting; find the enemy while he is small. The little guys are always easier to kill. *Btk* is less effective on mature larvae. Thoroughly spray the web and plant with *Btk*, as the insect must eat it in order for it to work.

Good website: http://bugguide.net/node/view/70367

Sawflies (minor to potentially serious)

For the last few years, we have received reports of a variety of different sawflies out and about. This year so far, European pine sawfly has been out working on pines earlier in the season. And now, the rose slug sawfly is feeding on roses (see next article). This may be another busy year for sawflies. So, who are they?

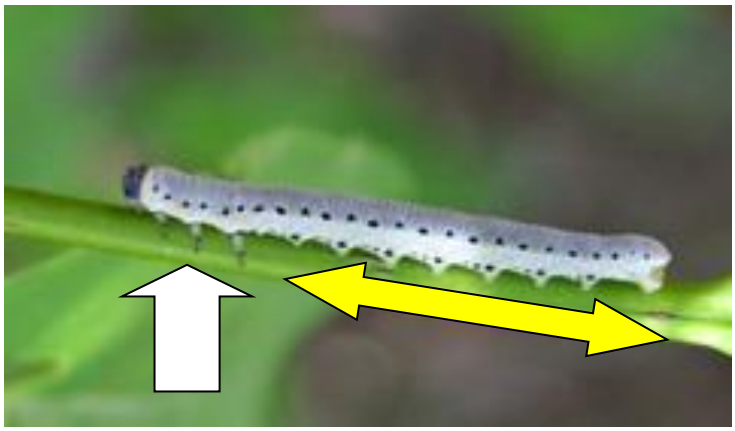

Figure 10 Sawfly larva shoeing true legs (white arrow) and prolegs (yellow arrow)

Sawflies are a large group of insects, literally hundreds of species. These insects can be confusing. As adults, they often have a fly-like or wasp-like appearance and may go unnoticed. As larvae, they look like caterpillars but are not true caterpillars (this means that *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* will NOT kill them). Sawfly larvae and caterpillars do differ from one another. While each will have three pairs of tiny legs near the head end of the body, they differ in the number of prolegs at the far end (fig. 10). Prolegs are outgrowths in the abdomen that the insect uses like legs. Caterpillars have five or fewer pairs, while sawfly larvae have six or more pairs. So, to be sure who you have, you'll need to get close and count those prolegs. Caterpillars have hooks, called crochets, on the bottom of their prolegs, so they can hold on tight. Sawfly larvae lack these hooks and can easily be dislodged from their host, so hitting them with a stream of water from the garden hose often gets rid of them. Sawfly larvae

vary in color by species. Some are very colorful, while others are not. Some may be identified by spots, spines or other marks.

Sawfly larvae eat foliage, and the severity of their damage depends on the host, the size of the population and general health of the plant. High populations of sawfly can do a lot of damage and will add some stress to the host's life, but generally won't kill the host. Repeated defoliation year after year can lead to decline. Deciduous hosts can often tolerate more damage than evergreen hosts. Healthy plants can tolerate more defoliation than weak plants.

Management: Because sawfly larvae don't have hooks on the prolegs, they can't hold on tight. That makes them easy to wash off with the garden hose or to pick by hand. Although sawflies look like caterpillars, they are not, so *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk) will NOT control this pest.

Good websites: https://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/insects/find/sawflies/
https://bugguide.net/node/view/13142

Roseslug sawfly (minor)

Speaking of sawflies, here is one that is irritating rose gardeners across the region. The roseslug sawfly (*Endelomyia aethiops*) is back again chewing on rose leaves. The larvae are greenish yellow with orange heads (fig. 11) and are about ½ inch long when fully grown. They resemble caterpillars but are not. They are often covered in a little slime that helps protect them from predators. When larvae mature, they lose their slimy coverings. The roseslug sawfly feeds on the upper layers of the leaf, leaving behind the lower epidermal layer and creating a "windowpane" effect. (Other rose pests may make bigger holes, all the way through the leaf.) Around mid-June larvae will drop to the ground to pupate, so this is a short-lived problem.

Figure 11 Roseslug sawfly larva and damage

Management: Minor infestations of roseslug sawfly can be controlled by using a forceful jet of water to dislodge the sawfly larvae or by handpicking. Although this insect looks like a caterpillar, it is not, so *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk) will NOT control this pest.

Good website: https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/roseslug-sawfly/

Rose plume moth caterpillar (minor)

The rose slug sawfly mentioned above may have company on your rose plant. Rose plume moth caterpillars (*Cnaemidophorus rhododactyla*) are now at work on roses. This larva is a caterpillar and is approximately ½ inch long. It is light green with a reddish stripe (fig. 12) running from its head to the middle of its body at one point in its life cycle. The adults are present June through August. New larvae are produced in fall and overwinter inside the stems of the rose. They resume feeding in spring.

Figure 12 Rose plume moth caterpillar

Plume moth larvae have been most commonly found near the tips of rose bushes, damaging the buds and leaves and sometimes creating some webbing. The caterpillar's color blends with the color of new rose growth nearly perfectly, so they may be difficult to find. A lot of frass (insect excrement) is also found in these areas.

Management: Pruning off infested tips may be the best management advice that can be offered at this time. Since this is a caterpillar, *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki (Btk)* should be effective, but is best used when the caterpillars are small.

Galls, part 2 (minor)

Ash midrib gall is a less common gall and we don't get to report on it very often. One of our scouts managed to find it this year. Just what the ash trees need, one more problem. The maker of this gall is a midge (related to flies). The gall forms along the midrib of some or all of the leaflets, causing the midrib to enlarge significantly (fig. 13).

Figure 13 Ash midrib gall

Oaks get a lot of different galls and we are starting to see some of them show up. Oak apple gall, true to its name, is found on oaks. This gall is caused by a cynipid wasp. The galls are globe-shaped (fig. 14) and filled with a spongy mass, and they are found on the leaves. These galls can be an inch or so in diameter when fully developed.

Figure 14 Oak apple gall

Good website: https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/plant-galls/

Pest Updates: Diseases

Update on cedar rust

Figure 15 Cedar rust on hawthorn

We talked about the cedar-rust diseases on junipers earlier this season. Now we are starting to see rust show up on the deciduous hosts. Look for small orange spots (fig. 15) on crabapple, apple and hawthorn. These are the major deciduous hosts. It is too late to spray. Despite it making the plants look odd, it actually does very little damage.

Rust on buckthorn (minor, unfortunately)

More rust!! This is a disease we always enjoy reporting, because it attacks an invasive plant. Unfortunately, it doesn't really damage the plant. Crown rust on buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) caused by the fungus *Puccinia coronata* is now showing up. In general, buckthorn is considered an invasive weed. A few years ago, the State of Illinois officially added it to the list of exotic weeds regulated by the Illinois Exotic Weed Act. The act states that "it shall be unlawful for any person . . . to buy, sell, offer for sale, distribute or plant .. . exotic weeds without a permit issued by the Department of Natural Resources". Buckthorn is an alternate host for this disease, which is also known as crown rust of oats. It can greatly reduce the yield on a crop of oats.

Figure 16 crown rust on buckthorn

Symptoms of crown rust on buckthorn are bright orange swollen spots (aecia) on leaves and petioles (fig. 16). There are many rust organisms, and this one is not the one that causes cedar apple rust. You may see rust diseases on other plants as well.

Management: None is required as buckthorn is not a desirable plant in the landscape. Removal of buckthorn is recommended since it is an exotic weed.

Good website: http://ipm.illinois.edu/diseases/rpds/109.pdf

Pest Updates: Weeds

Pokeweed (dangerous)

Here is one of those situations where a native plant can cause trouble for us even as it serves pollinators and animals. Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) is a native plant, but it can also be a

dangerous one. It is dangerous to handle and ingest. It commonly grows in wet areas such as meadows and marshes, as well as open fields and disturbed areas. We often find it popping up in home gardens as well. It produces beautiful dark purple fruit which are very tempting, but which should not be eaten. Consumption can cause symptoms such as gastrointestinal issues, nausea, vomiting, headache, and seizures. In addition to that, sap from the plant can be absorbed through broken skin and can cause a rash in some individuals.

Figure 17 Pokeweed forming fruit (Photo: S. Yiesla)

Pokeweed is a fairly easy plant to identify (fig. 17). It is a large perennial that can grow up to 8 to 10 feet tall, but can be a bit smaller than that in many situations. It has a very sturdy stem that is often reddish or purplish in color. The simple, oval leaves of this plant are several inches long with untoothed edges. The plant produces an elongated stalk of tiny white flowers, which will produce the tempting deep purple fruit.

Management: While this plant does serve pollinators and produces food for birds and animals, removal may be warranted in home gardens where small children and pets may be exposed to the temptations of the pretty fruit. To remove the plant, cut it down at the ground before it has a chance to set fruit. The root can be dug out.

Good website: https://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/weeds/plants/pokeweed.htm

---

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 .

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	2026.4	May 15
2026.2	April 17	2026.5	May 29
2026.3	May 1		

Aphids, woolly 4
Azalea lace bug 4
Bagworm 5
Bishop's weed 4
Black knot 2
Boxwood blight or something else 2
Boxwood leafminer 3, 4
Boxwood mites 3
Boxwood psyllid 3
Cedar-rust disease 3, 5
Cleavers 4
Crabgrass preventer 1
Creeping bellflower 2
Cytospora canker 3
Eastern tent caterpillar 2
Egg masses and more 1
Elm flea weevil 3
Euonymus webworm 5
European pine sawfly 2
Ficaria verna 1
Four-lined plant bug 5
Frost/freeze damage 4
Fungicides, timing 1
Gall, ash-midrib 5
Gall, elm sack 4
Gall, maple bladder 4
Gall, oak-apple 5
Gall, witch-hazel cone 4
Garden cleanup and native plants 2
Garlic mustard 2
Ground cover diseases and more 3
Hydrangea leaftier 3
Indicator plants, what they tell us 1
No-mow May 3
Peach leaf curl 4
Pestalotiopsis on arborvitae 2
Poison hemlock 3
Pokeweed 5
Powdery mildew on ninebark 4
Rhizosphaera needlecast 3
Rose plume moth caterpillar 5
Rust on buckthorn 5
Sawflies 5
Sawfly, roseslug 5
Scale, euonymus 4
Scale, magnolia 1
Scale, oystershell 4
Spittlebug 5
Spongy moth 2
Spotted lanternfly 2
Tools you can use 1
Using growing degree days 1
Viburnum leaf beetle 2
Weather, climate and water 1