

Plant Health Care Report

Scouting Report of The Morton Arboretum



THE
CHAMPION
of TREES

Aug 21, 2026

Issue 2026.11

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).

Next week will be our last issue for the season

Quick View

What indicator plant is in bloom at the Arboretum?

Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) is in flower (fig. 1).

Accumulated Growing Degree Days (Base 50) at The Morton Arboretum: 2363.5 (as of Aug 19)

Insects/other pests

- Fall galls

Diseases

- Tar spot of maple
- Leaf spots
- The truth about blight

Miscellaneous

- Blossom-end rot



Figure 1 Chicory (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 8/20/2026	St. Charles reporting station (north)	Champaign reporting station (central)	Carbondale reporting station (south)
2-inch, bare soil	81.4	87.8	89.2
4-inch, bare soil	79.6	87.3	83.9
4-inch, under sod	77.5	85.4	81.7
8-inch, under sod	75.6	80.8	80.3

* 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	1.78	1.86	4.14
June	8.05	4.77	4.19
July	8.31	6.11	3.98
Aug	8.25 (as of 8/19)	6.01 (whole month)	3.78 (whole month)
Sept			
Year to date	39.4 (thru 8/19)	28.93 (thru Aug)	26.04 (thru Aug)

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

The historical average (1937-2025) for this date at The Morton Arboretum is 2169 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 8/20/2026	GDD as of 8/21/2025	GDD as of 8/20/2020	GDD as of 8/20/2015
Carbondale, IL*	3502	3398	2896	3111
Champaign, IL*	2836	2889	2469	2670
Chicago Botanic Garden**	No report	No report	2289	1949
Glencoe*	1838	1870	1857	No report
Chicago O'Hare*	2625	2575	2349	2366
Kankakee, IL*	2658	2531	2299	2342
Lisle, IL*	2571	2621	2387	No report
The Morton Arboretum	2363.5	2421	2279	2066.5
Quincy, IL*	3088	2928	2613	2795
Rockford, IL*	1408	2397	2192	2035
Springfield, IL*	3043	2931	2546	2777
Waukegan, IL* (60087)	2213	2177	2070	2002
Waukegan, IL* (60085)	2318	2316	2152	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

Fall galls (minor)

We are featuring a nice selection of late season galls for you this week. We write about these just so you know what you are looking at. Most galls are very minor and we don't need to treat for them.

This is the time of year when two common galls are showing up on goldenrod. They are the goldenrod fly gall and the goldenrod bunch gall.

The goldenrod fly gall (*Eurosta solidaginis*) shows up as those interesting ball shapes (fig. 2) in the goldenrod stem. The gall maker lives inside that round gall and will pupate there in spring.

The goldenrod bunch gall is caused by a midge (*Rhopalomyia solidaginis*). The larva of this midge secretes a chemical that stops the goldenrod stem from growing any taller. The leaves keep forming, though. This leads to a bunch of shortened leaves (fig. 3) at the end of the stem. Actually, very pretty!

In the last couple of years, we have been seeing another gall on goldenrod with some regularity. A couple of years ago one of our scouts found AND identified a gall I had never seen before, the carbonifera or ambrosia gall (fig. 4) on goldenrod. This gall is caused by the gall midge *Asteromyia carbonifera*. This is a cool gall to look at, but the back story on this gall is really interesting. To see that story, check out [this article](#) by Joe Boggs of OSU Extension.

We have seen fewer galls this summer, but the ones we have seen are the ones we see year after year. I have been eagerly awaiting one my favorites, but it has not been reported yet. Here it is anyway, just so you recognize it. It is the oak lobed gall (fig. 5), sometimes called the pine cone oak gall, and it is a crowd-pleaser. It shows up on oaks and looks a bit like a pine cone, due to actually being a cluster of small wedge-shaped galls. The whole cluster is often 2 to 3 inches across and goes through some interesting color changes (pinks, reds and browns), that really get it noticed. Oak lobed gall is most commonly found on swamp white oak and bur oak. It is caused by a tiny wasp, *Andricus quercusstrobilanus* (a cool name for a cool gall maker). Like other galls we commonly see, it does not harm the tree.

This year I am noticing, on the numerous thistles that grace my yard, a



Figure 2 Goldenrod fly gall
(photo: S. Viesla)



Figure 3 Goldenrod bunch gall



Figure 4 Ambrosia gall (Photo: L. Miranda)



Figure 5 Oak lobed gall

stem gall similar to the fly gall on goldenrod mentioned above. It is the thistle stem gall caused by another fly, *Urophora cardui*. Apparently, this insect was introduced to North America as a possible biocontrol for Canada thistle. It is present in my yard, but so far, the thistles are still winning.

Good websites: <https://bugguide.net/node/view/225386>
<https://www.bugguide.net/node/view/110075>
<https://fieldguide.mt.gov/speciesDetail.aspx?elcode=IIDIP4AB20>

Pest Updates: Diseases

Tar spot of maple (minor)

With the wet spring we had, we have been expecting to see a lot of tar spot this year. So far, no reports in our area. It is worth keeping a watch for this, not because it is serious, but because it worries people when they find it on their maples. Some years, we don't get reports until people are raking the fallen leaves in autumn. As the name indicates, the spots will look just like shiny black spots of tar (fig. 6) flung about on the upper surface of maple leaves.



Figure 6 Tar spot of maple (photo: S. Yiesla)

Several different fungi in the genus *Rhytisma* infect the leaves of maples and cause the spots. The spots range from 1/5 to 4/5 inch in diameter. In some cases, a red ring surrounds the spot. *Rhytisma* spp. most commonly infect leaves of silver and Norway maples, although red and sugar maples are also susceptible. It does little harm to the trees, but is unsightly.

Management: Fungicides generally are not necessary. To reduce inoculum, rake up and discard the leaves in fall. Raking, however, is only effective if you and your neighbors with infected maples all rake and discard leaves.

Good website: <https://mortonarb.org/plant-and-protect/tree-plant-care/plant-care-resources/tar-spot-of-maple-rhytisma-spp/>

Leaf spots on everything (minor)

Fungi love water. We had a WET spring and that is the time of year when many fungal infections occur. When leaves are young and soft, it is easier for fungal spores to penetrate

them. If you look around the landscape right now, it seems like every tree, shrub and flowering plant has some sort of fungal leaf spot. That tends to happen when we have a rainy spring.

This year, the rain came at a very inopportune time, just as the new leaves were opening on many plants. Many leaf infections occurred during that rainy spell. The symptoms take a little time to develop, so leaf spots have become very noticeable this summer. Luckily, the majority of leaf spots are minor, doing little to no harm to the host plant.

Leaf spots that lead to defoliation of the plant, especially early in the season, are of concern because they limit the plant's ability to make food (leaves are the food factories of the plant). Most leaf spots do not lead to defoliation and do not require any treatment. No one likes to look at spotted leaves, but at least the long-term health of the tree is not in danger (and as I much as I hate to say it, before we know it, the leaves will be falling because it is autumn).

The truth about 'blight'

In the Plant Clinic at The Morton Arboretum we often hear this statement, "I was told my plant has blight." This does not tell us much, because blight is such a broad term. It indicates that we are looking at a serious problem that can produce major damage to, or even the death of, a plant. The word blight, used by itself is vague. To really get some meaning from it, we need to have another word in front of it. If we say fire blight, we are discussing a specific disease that can do a tremendous amount of damage to plants that are in the rose family, like crabapple. It often kills the host. Fire blight has a specific group of hosts and has a distinct set of symptoms. If we put the word 'boxwood' in front of blight, we are again talking about a specific disease found on certain hosts (mostly boxwood) and which has a distinct set of symptoms. Now, we are communicating!

One simple word changes the conversation. If you are a green professional, diagnosing a problem for your customer, take some time to give them a bit more detail. Some homeowners know a lot about plants, but some don't. Many homeowners don't converse with green professionals on a regular basis and may not understand the jargon and may not be sure what questions to ask. A little extra information is good customer service and that could bring a customer back to you time and time again.

Miscellaneous

Blossom-end rot

You planted and tended your tomato plants. You are rewarded with flowers. The pollinators visit your flowers and before you know it there are tiny tomatoes forming. Then one day, you discover that the bottom of the tomato is turning black (fig. 7) and sometimes almost leathery.

This is blossom-end rot. The bottom of the tomato is called the blossom end, because that is where the flower or blossom was connected. That little dark dot on the bottom of the tomato marks the spot where the flower was.

This type of 'rot' is not a disease. It is caused by a calcium deficiency. Calcium is an important building block of the cell walls within every plant. When it is deficient, the cell walls don't form properly and the cells collapse. Blossom-end rot does not always mean that there is not enough calcium in the soil. It means that the calcium is not making it all the way to the bottom of your tomato. Our soils are generally not deficient in calcium.



Figure 7 Blossom-end rot

Improper watering or very dry weather are often the reasons we don't get the calcium out to the bottom of the tomatoes. The water carries the calcium from the soil into the plant. If water is lacking, the calcium can't be delivered. Even though we have been having heavy rains, we have also had extreme heat that can dry that rain up quickly. As summer progresses we may get more heat and less rain. That makes us responsible to give our plants what they need in terms of water. Often, gardeners are watering frequently, but not deeply. Watering every day is not needed for in-ground gardens. Water those plants when the top inch or so of soil is drying, and when you water be sure to water thoroughly. If you have to water every day or every other day, you are not watering thoroughly. Water long enough to get water into the soil at least five or six inches.

Container-grown tomatoes are the exception. They most likely will need to be watered every day due to the small volume of the container. Water containers enough so that some water comes out the drainage holes in the bottom of the container. Container-grown tomatoes often get blossom-end rot because it can be difficult to maintain adequate water in containers. Also, unlike our garden soils, potting mixes for containers may need to have calcium added.

Blossom-end rot is not only seen on tomatoes. It can be on other vegetables as well, such as peppers and watermelons.



[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 Julia Baker, 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/>

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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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