Confessions of a Black Thumb

Drought Stress

- Victims
  - Hostas
  - Many a potted plant
- Causes of the problem
  - Unwillingness to water
  - Cluelessness that plants really DO need water

Lessons learned
- Water adequately
  - ~1 inch of water per week for established plants
  - ~1.5 to 2 inches of water per week for new transplants
- Mulch properly
  - ~1 to 2 inches for heavier (clay) soils
  - ~3 to 4 inches for lighter (sandy) soils

Other considerations
- Water correctly
  - Use a drip or soaker hose
  - DO NOT use a sprinkler
- Water at the correct time
  - Water when it is cool (late evening/early morning)
  - DO NOT water when it is hot (mid-day)

Victim: Dappled willow
- Causes of the problem
  - Pure unadulterated stupidity
  - Inability to admit I can’t remember everything
  - Inability to set a timer
Confessions of a Black Thumb
Overwatering

- Lessons learned
  - Buy AND USE a timer!
  - DO NOT overwater
    - ~1 inch of water per week for established plants
    - ~1.5 to 2 inches of water per week for new transplants
  - How and when you water can be immaterial
  - How much you mulch can be immaterial
- Other considerations: None

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Walnut Toxicity

- Victim: Fothergilla
- Cause of the problem
  - Planting plants susceptible to juglones
  - Not removing walnuts planted by neighborhood squirrels

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Walnut Toxicity

- Lessons learned
  - Walnut trees really CAN kill other plants
  - Be careful what you plant near established walnuts
  - Remove volunteer walnut trees promptly

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Walnut Toxicity

- Other considerations
  - Vegetables can have problems with juglones
    - Sensitive: pepper, eggplant, potato, TOMATO
    - Tolerant: beans, beet, carrot, corn, melon, onion, parsnip, squash
  - Making raised beds may help prevent issues
  - DO not use or compost walnut leaves or fruits
  - Cutting down a walnut will not immediately solve your problems
Confessions of a Black Thumb
Verticillium Wilt

• Victim: Redbud
• Causes of the problem
  – Planting a susceptible host
  – Bad luck

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Verticillium Wilt

• Lessons learned
  – You can inherit plant disease problems
  – Sometimes the stars are against you
  – Sometimes diseases can serve as biocontrol

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Verticillium Wilt

• Other considerations
  – Resistant/immune plants can be your friends
    • Pines, spruces, firs, junipers
    • Beech, birch, ginkgo, hackberry, hawthorn, hickory, honey locust, mountain ash, white oak, bur oak, poplar, serviceberry, sycamore, willow
  – Clean up leaf litter
  – Avoid municipal mulches
  – Fungicides will not likely help

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Phomopsis Tip Blight

• Victim(s): ‘Moonglow’ juniper (15)
• Causes of the problem
  – Really, REALLY poor variety selection
  – Crowding shrubs
  – Planting in an overly shaded area
  – Lack of proper watering
**Confessions of a Black Thumb**

**Phomopsis Tip Blight**

- **Lessons learned**
  - Use appropriate resistant cultivars/varieties
    - "Juniper Diseases" ([https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Juniper-Diseases](https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Juniper-Diseases))
  - DO NOT crowd plants when planting
  - Use the right plant in the right location
  - Water when needed

- **Other considerations**
  - Avoid over-fertilization (nitrogen)
  - Prune diseased branches, but avoid excessive pruning
  - Decontaminate pruning tools (70% alcohol, disinfectants, 10% bleach)
  - Destroy infected materials (burn where allowed, bury)

- **Other considerations**
  - Consider fungicides where appropriate
    - Is this how you want to spend your time?
    - Apply from bud break through period of rapid growth
    - Apply every 7-21 days
    - Mancozeb, copper, thiophanate-methyl
    - Alternate active ingredients (FRAC Codes)

**Victim:** Japanese maple

- **Cause of the problem**
  - Wanting to grow non-hardy plants

**Winter Injury**

- **Lessons learned**
  - Just because you love it, doesn’t mean you should plant it
  - Use appropriate cold hardy plants
  - Pray for
    - Lots of snow
    - A slow, gradual winter cool down
    - Limited temperature fluctuations
    - A slow spring warm up
Confessions of a Black Thumb
Winter Injury

• Other considerations
  – Plant trees and shrubs
    • Properly
    • In protected locations (sensitive plants)
  – Water trees and shrubs properly
  – Protect sensitive plants

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Rhizosphaera Needle Cast

• Victim: ‘Fat Albert’ blue spruce
• Cause of the problem
  – Planting a blue spruce
  – Not taking into account environmental changes in my landscape
  – Overcrowding
  – Lack of proper watering
  – Planting a blue spruce, planting a blue spruce, planting a blue spruce!!!!!!!!!!!!

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Rhizosphaera Needle Cast

• Lessons learned
  – DO NOT plant blue spruce, DO NOT plant blue spruce, DO NOT PLANT BLUE SPRUCE!!!!!!!!
  – DO NOT crowd plants
  – Landscape environmental conditions change
  – Plants survive better when cared for properly
  – Plants have a finite life span (some more than others)
  – Sometimes it's better to cut and run

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Rhizosphaera Needle Cast

• Other considerations
  – Plant dwarf blue spruce varieties
  – Thin healthy branches to increase airflow
  – Prune diseased branches
  – Consider fungicides where appropriate
    • Is this how you want to spend your time?
    • Copper, chlorothalonil
    • Ever 3-4 weeks starting at bud break while favorable environmental conditions occur

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Tar Spot

• Victim: Norway maple
• Causes of the problem
  – Lack of time due to work obligations
  – Laziness
Confessions of a Black Thumb

Tar Spot

• Lessons learned
  – Make time for gardening
  – DO NOT be lazy
  – Do proper leaf clean up
    • Fall or early spring
    • Burn where allowed, bury, hot compost

• Other considerations
  – Consider fungicides where appropriate
    • Most often never
    • Young or focal point trees
    • Copper applied at bud break, 1/2 and full leaf expansion

Tar Spot

• Victim: Hosta Virus X

• Cause of the problem
  – Buying infected plants
  – Not removing infected plants promptly
  – Moving the virus while gardening

• Lessons learned
  – You can bring diseases home from the store
    • ‘Gold Edger’ • ‘Gold Standard’
    • ‘Golden Tiara’ • ‘Striptease’
    • ‘Sum and Substance’
  – You may not know that the plant is diseased
  – You can easily move this virus
    • Shovels • Knives
    • Lawnmowers • String Edgers
Confessions of a Black Thumb
Hosta Virus X

• Other considerations
  – Infected plants should be removed
    (burn where allowed, bury, hot compost)
  – Be sure to decontaminate
    • 1% Sodium dodecyl sulfate (sodium lauryl sulfate) + 1% Alconox® (2½ Tbsp + 2½ Tbsp/gal)
    • Trisodium phosphate (14 dry oz/gal)
    • 20% low fat dry milk (Carnation®) + 0.1% polysorbate 20 (9⅛ cups + ¾ tsp/gal)
    • Alcohol dip followed by flaming

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Tobacco Rattle

• Victims
  – Bleeding heart
  – Goldenrod
  – Likely many others

• Causes of the problem
  – Buying infected plants
  – Not removing infected plants

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Tobacco Rattle

• Other considerations
  – This virus is easily moved from plant to plant (mechanically, via nematodes)
  – This virus is a HUGE deal in potato production
  – Infected plants should be removed
    (burn where allowed, bury, hot compost)
  – Immune plants are limited
    • Annual phlox, carnation, Datura, sweet William, zinnia

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Tobacco Rattle

• Lessons learned
  – You can bring diseases home from the store
  – You may not know that the plant is diseased
  – Diseased plants can survive for a long time
  – Disease symptoms can look quite beautiful
  – Diseased plants can be useful (at least to me)
Confessions of a Black Thumb
Where to Go for Help (?)

Plant Disease Diagnostics Clinic
Department of Plant Pathology
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1630 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706-1598
(608) 262-2863
pddc@wisc.edu
https://pddc.wisc.edu
Follow on Facebook and Twitter @UWPDDC