**Segment for Week of 4 October 2021**

**Laurel Wilt**

This is Julie Callahan bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Today you will hear more information about a new threat to Virginia’s forests. The USDA Diagnostic Lab confirmed [**laurel wilt disease**](https://dof.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/FT0056_Laurel-Wilt-Disease_pub.pdf) on September 9 from a sample collected in Scott County. This was the first detection of this disease in Virginia, although it has been confirmed throughout much of the South and in our neighboring states of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

Laurel wilt is caused by a fungal pathogen, which is carried by the redbay ambrosia beetle. Both the beetle and the fungus are native to Asia and were first detected in North America in 2002, near Savannah, Georgia. Since then, laurel wilt has spread north to Kentucky and west to Texas. In June of 2021, symptoms were observed on sassafras in Scott County, Virginia, and the disease was later confirmed.

All species in the laurel family native to North America are susceptible to laurel wilt. In Virginia, these are primarily redbay, sassafras, and spicebush. Female redbay ambrosia beetles enter suitable host trees, carrying fungal spores in their mouthparts. The fungus colonizes cells in the plant tissue, causing a reaction that disrupts water movement within the tree. As the tree declines, it is attacked by more redbay ambrosia beetles and other species of ambrosia beetles.

An early symptom of laurel wilt disease is discolored, wilting foliage. Initially, just a few branches may be impacted, but leaf browning eventually occurs throughout the

entire tree. On deciduous trees, such as sassafras, leaves fall off the tree shortly after turning brown. On evergreen species, such as redbay, brown and wilted foliage is retained for months after infection. Laurel wilt causes rapid mortality, often within

one growing season. Should a tree persist, it will have stunted foliage the following year and succumb to the disease soon after.

No large-scale management tactics are currently available for laurel wilt disease. For high-value specimen trees, an injection with the fungicide propiconazole can preventatively guard against laurel wilt, but this treatment will only be beneficial for healthy trees or shrubs. If possible, remove and destroy infested trees and shrubs.

Learn more about laurel wilt and what you can do to control it by callingyour local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MOC02aGJKRn4omB6PL_484U7LpMgHpD2/view>