

Updates from the Plant Diagnostic Clinic

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Once again due to Covid, we did not have any MG Helpline volunteers in the Plant Diagnostic Clinic. The lab only accepted physical samples for analysis from commercial growers. Hopefully by next summer, we will be back to normal operations! Of course, disease, pest and weed questions did not slow down and Vermont gardeners' questions could be posted on the ASK EXTENSION website and answered by knowledgeable MG volunteers, Lisa Chouinard and occasional input from me. We will likely do a survey of clients at season's end but overall the gardeners seemed to appreciate the quick and thoughtful responses from the Master Gardeners.

We had a dry June in Vermont, helping to minimize some of those early season diseases like damping off root rots and apple scab. We did see pockets of fungal anthracnose in maples, oaks and ash, but typically not enough to cause defoliation. This did not slow down the star of the season, the moth formerly known as the Gypsy moth. This voracious caterpillar was everywhere, causing a lot of defoliation in hardwoods with feces raining down on gardener's heads! After pupating, turning into adults and laying buff-colored eggs everywhere, the outbreak subsided. Be ready next spring for the small caterpillars to emerge and start feeding again.

Rain seemed to pick up near the end of June and at least Chittenden county enjoyed regular weekly or so rains for the rest of the summer. Northern Vermont tended to be very dry while southern Vermont got deluged! With each rain, diseases tend to pick up and we saw a lot of fireblight attacking apples, crabapples and pears. This bacterial disease likes warm wet conditions and can cause severe blighting of shoots. Fungal leafspot diseases (*Alternaria* and *Septoria*) showed up on lower branches of tomatoes as the season progressed although no late blight has blown into the state as of mid- September, the third summer in a row without the devastating disease!

As temperatures cool we will see more dews, fogs and cold nights so diseases will continue to increase. Clean up the garden as you harvest to minimize overwintering inoculum (spores of fungi) for next spring!