

Pest Spring Wrap Up and Summer Heads Up

By Ann Hazelrigg

The spring was beautiful, at least in my backyard: wisteria, lupines and peonies blooming all at once and fireflies at night! However, not all is rosy. The spring was dominated by **spongy moth** infestations. They are growing like teenagers. I have been handpicking my specimen plants (weeping larch trained over an arch) and throwing them in the field, hoping they won't make it back. Just can't kill them, they are too big and juicy. Using burlap wrapped around the trunk to capture them at night when they travel down the trunk and handpicking the hiding larvae is a good control right now. Tanglefoot will also intercept the pests climbing back up to the tops of the tree in the daytime. They should be starting to pupate soon, so handpicking those helps. I have noticed a lot more infected caterpillars with the fungal and viral diseases which is great. Also have seen pupae of a parasitic wasp attached to their dead bodies.

<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/spongy-moths>



(L) Spongy moth larvae killed by virus hang in an upside-down V. Steven Katovich, Bugwood.org (R) Spongy moth caterpillar killed by a fungal pathogen. Steven Katovich, Bugwood.org.

Other pests I have noticed this spring include **azalea bark scale** on one of my Northern Lights azaleas. They are hard to see but if you look closely, you can see the small bumps on the twigs. I have tried to hand rub them off but will go back with Neem to kill the crawlers. Scale insects will suck plant juices on many different genera of woody plants and each one has a bit different lifecycle with different vulnerable stages, so a positive id is critical. Often you notice the sooty mold that grows on the sticky sweet excrement of the pest. The sooty mold is not pathogenic but can cut down on the photosynthetic ability of the plant. If you grow magnolias, you should check them for scale periodically since they attack

that plant often.

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/thin_azaleas_with_crusty_stems_may_have_azalea_bark_scale

I have seen **peach leaf curl** on stone fruits causing distorted pinkish leaves.

<https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/plpath-fru-26> This is an early season fungus disease that prefers cool wet conditions and is striking to see but not very damaging. Once you see it, it is too late to control it and typically, a fungicide is not warranted.



Peach leaf curl. Paul Bachi, University of Kentucky Research and Education Center, Bugwood.org

Flea beetles are a common pest on new vegetable transplants as are **cucumber beetles**. Transplants can be dipped in a kaolin clay suspension to act as an anti-feedant for a couple of weeks, allowing the plants to get bigger and better able to withstand the pests or row covers at planting will help exclude the pests.

Colorado potato beetles are out in full force. Handpick eggs and small larvae before they get too big.

Basil downy mildew is here early this year. The top part of the foliage looks sunburned or nutritionally deficient, but the leaf undersides look dirty with lots of gray spores. Typically, once this pathogen arrives in our area, it is here to stay and infect later plantings of basil. There are resistant cultivars, but these are not immune, and will eventually get the disease when there are a lot of spores/inoculum around.



(L) Leaf underside sporulation of basil downy mildew fungus. Angela Madeiras, UMASS (R) yellowing on leaf upperside due to basil downy mildew. U of Florida.

Tomato leaf spot diseases to start around July 4th so make sure your plants are staked, mulched to prevent soil splash up and pruned for good air circulation! There are two that are problematic, early blight and Septoria leafspot and both show up every year to some extent. Rainy years are worse than dry years.



(L) Septoria leaf spot of tomato U of MD (R) Alternaria leaf spot/early blight of tomato. Clemson University, Bugwood.org

Things to watch out for include **spotted lantern fly (SLF)** and **beech leaf disease**. Spotted lantern fly is not in Vermont yet but could arrive on nursery stock as egg masses imported from other states. Please inspect any the trunks or branches of trees or shrubs you have recently purchased for the cement-like egg masses. The very distinctive invasive pest can easily be identified in the nymph or adult stage. They feed *en masse* on grapes and apples among other plants and their excrement fosters the growth of black sooty mold. Report any finds to Vermont Invasives at <https://vtinvasives.org/reporting-spotted-lanternfly>.



(L) SLF adult on a maple tree. Getty Images (R) First instar-third instar nymph of SLF. NJ Dept of Ag



(L) SLF 4th instar nymph. NJ Dept of Ag NJ (R) SLF egg mass. Getty Images

Beech leaf disease is a new disease in the northeast that threatens all ornamental and native beeches. The disease, caused by a microscopic worm called a nematode, causes a foliar blight, defoliation and death of trees. Symptoms in the leaves include striping, curling, and/or leathery texture of the foliage which can be visible throughout the growing season. Affected leaves wither, dry, and yellow and reduced leaf and bud production may occur. The disease can kill mature beech trees in 6-10 years and can kill younger trees even more quickly, with some saplings dying within a year. Please let the Plant Diagnostic Clinic know if you see this disease.



(L) Beech leaves exhibiting the striping associated with beech leaf disease. NY DEC (R) Thinning canopy of beech trees due to the disease. NY DEC.