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

Drought Stress

- 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

Drought Stress

- 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)

Overwatering

- 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
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Verticillium Wilt

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

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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

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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”
      (Available upon request)
    • “Disease and Insect Resistant Ornamental Plants: Juniperus (Junipers)”
      (https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/56372.2)
  – Do NOT crowd plants when planting
  – Use the right plant in the right location
  – Water when needed

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Phomopsis Tip Blight

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

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Phomopsis Tip Blight

• 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)

Confessions of a Black Thumb
Winter Injury

• Victim: Japanese maple
• Cause of the problem
  – Wanting to grow non-hardy plants

Confessions of a Black Thumb
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
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Winter Injury

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

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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!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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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

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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

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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

#### Hosta Virus X

**Victim:** Hosta

**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
Hosta Virus X

- 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 + 2¼ Tbsp/gal)
  - Trisodium phosphate (14 dry oz/gal)
  - Alcohol dip followed by flaming

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

• 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

• 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
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