Mound Vue Garden Club

Confessions of a Black Thumb: Plants That I Have Killed (Or at Least Seriously Maimed)

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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

Confessions of a Black Thumb
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

Confessions of a Black Thumb
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)

Confessions of a Black Thumb
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

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**Walnut Toxicity**

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

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**Lessons learned**

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

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**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

**Lessons learned**

- You can inherit plant disease problems
- Sometimes the stars are against you
- Sometimes diseases can serve as biocontrol

**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” (Contact the PDDC for a copy)
    • “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

• 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
Winter Injury

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

• 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
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

• 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

• 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® (2 1/2 Tbsp + 2 3/4 Tbsp/gal)
    - Trisodium phosphate (14 dry oz/gal)
    - Alcohol dip followed by flaming

- **Victims**
  - Bleeding heart
  - Goldenrod
  - Likely many others

- **Causes of the problem**
  - Buying infected plants
  - Not removing infected plants

**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)

- **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

- **Other considerations**
  - You need to decontaminate
    - 1% Sodium dodecyl sulfate (sodium lauryl sulfate) + 1% Alconox® (2 1/2 Tbsp + 2 3/4 Tbsp/gal)
    - Trisodium phosphate (14 dry oz/gal)
    - Alcohol dip followed by flaming