

Taking Boxwood Disease Seriously

by Carol Ann Harlos
(thanks to Betsy Moll)

Boxwood greens that we purchase have the potential to bring the boxwood blight fungus *Cylindrocladium buxicola* to both our own properties and those of our neighbors! *Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa' (English boxwood) and *B. sempervirens* (American or common boxwood) appear to be highly susceptible.

The Virginia Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services believes this is exactly what occurred in 2015. After the holidays the symptoms of disease: brown leaf spots, black streaking on the stems of boxwood, and eventual defoliation became rampant in a neighborhood where neighbors often met and shared plant material and shearers. All the boxwoods in the affected neighborhood were subsequently removed by the residents and burned.

The boxwood blight fungus readily forms fruiting structures on infected plants. These structures called sporodochia can be seen on the undersides of infected leaves and on the black lesions on stems.

Infected plant material is the primary means for long-distance spread. The key factor for unintentional spread of this disease is the movement of apparently "healthy" boxwoods (infected, but asymptomatic or having very limited outward symptoms) or boxwoods treated with fungicides that suppress, but do not kill or eradicate the fungus, to nurseries and landscapes. This method of disease transmission is often called the "Trojan horse" or "Typhoid Mary" syndrome.

To keep boxwood blight from spreading:

- Don't purchase boxwood off-site. Either use boxwood from existing gardens or use other plant species avoiding boxwood completely.

- If the use of boxwood is desired, either use fresh cut boxwood from known properties or from sources that certify that the boxwood being sold is not infected.
- At the end of the season don't put used boxwood cuttings in compost. Double-bag and dispose with regular garbage.
- When making boxwood cuttings from your own property wipe pruners judiciously between cuttings with alcohol wipes.



Photo of boxwood compliments of David L. Clement, University of Maryland, Bugwood.org



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