

# Pest Update (December 18-25, 2019)

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John Ball, Forest Health Specialist SD Department of Agriculture,  
Extension Forester SD Cooperative Extension

Email: [john.ball@sdsu.edu](mailto:john.ball@sdsu.edu)

Phone: office 605-688-4737, cell 605-695-2503

Samples sent to: John Ball

Agronomy, Horticulture and Plant Science Department  
rm 314, Berg Agricultural Hall, Box 2207A  
South Dakota State University  
Brookings, SD 57007-0996

Note: samples containing living tissue may only be accepted from South Dakota. Please do not send samples of dying plants or insects from other states. If you live outside of South Dakota and have a question, instead please send a digital picture of the pest or problem.

## Available on the net at:

<http://sdda.sd.gov/conservation-forestry/forest-health/tree-pest-alerts/>

Any treatment recommendations, including those identifying specific pesticides, are for the convenience of the reader. Pesticides mentioned in this publication are generally those that are most commonly available to the public in South Dakota and the inclusion of a product shall not be taken as an endorsement or the exclusion a criticism regarding effectiveness. Please read and follow all label instructions and the label is the final authority for a product's use on a pest or plant. Products requiring a commercial pesticide license are occasionally mentioned if there are limited options available. These products will be identified as such, but it is the reader's responsibility to determine if they can legally apply any products identified in this publication.

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## Plant development for the growing season

The days are now slowing becoming longer but we have a lot of cold, snowy weather ahead of us. The recent state-wide snowstorm was a wet, heavy snow, more like the snow experienced out in the more humid East. The combination of leaves still attached to many trees (see the last issue of the *Update*) and the heavy snow that cling to them has resulted in broken branches.

## Timely Topics

### ***What to do with a live Christmas tree?***



Every year some folks decide to decorate a live tree for Christmas. These are usually smaller plants rather than a 6-foot tree, but regardless of size, the question now is what to do with them for the rest of the winter?

The two trees I see sold as live Christmas trees in South Dakota are 2-foot Colorado blue spruce or American arborvitae (pictured to the left). These potted trees are small enough that someone might think they can just treat them like a fig or rubber tree – put them in a sunny room and water. This is a mistake. These are not tropical trees that are adapted to warm weather year-around but temperate trees that expect, and even require, winter cold before growing the next season.

So, keeping in a warm, sunny room is not what they need. Instead they need to be exposed to cold temperatures for a few months. Ideally the live tree has only been in the house for 10 to 14 days, if it been in longer, the tree may now be more susceptible to freezing weather. If it has been in the home for three weeks or more, you'll need to move it into a place with cold (33 to 40°F) temperatures rather than freezing temperatures.

Even if the tree was only inside for a week or two, keeping it in cool, rather than freezing temperature, is probably best. While the above-ground portion of the tree – the trunk and foliage – can take the cold, the below-ground tree, the roots, can only tolerate temperature to about 20°F. Since the pots for these trees are only 1 to 2-feet in diameter and of equal depth they lack the insulation qualities of the ground and will reach the ambient air temperature within a few days. If the air temperatures stay in the 10°F or lower for a few days, the roots in the pot will die.

The best approach for winter survival of these potted trees is to place them in an unheated garage (light is not necessary or even desirable) and place straw or other insulating material around and over the pot to keep it from warmer than 20°F.

### ***Should we be planting Freedom honeysuckle (Lonicera x 'Freedom')?***

This was a question I received from a Conservation District office last week. 'Freedom' is one of the honeysuckles that is resistant to the Russian honeysuckle aphid (*Hyadaphis tataricae*). This is the aphid that causes the terminals of the plant

to be covered with long witches'-brooms (see picture below). 'Arnold Red' and 'Freedom' are the two most common resistant cultivars available.



They will not be subject to the witches'-broom, but are they still invasive? That's what the Conservation District wanted to know. Tatarian honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*) is a woody shrub that can become about 8 to 10 feet tall. It has pink flowers in the spring, followed by inedible red berries in late summer. The birds love the fruit and carry the seeds everywhere. The plant will also grow almost anywhere so this combination means that Tatarian

honeysuckle sprouts up in places we don't want it.

'Arnold Red' is a Tatarian honeysuckle cultivar while 'Freedom' is a cross between *L. korolkowii* and *L. tatarica*. A third cultivar, Honeyrose; is thought to be a cross between two Tatarian honeysuckles, 'Arnold Red' and 'Zabelii'. Regardless, these three cultivars have at least one parent as Tatarian honeysuckle.



Tatarian honeysuckle is not as aggressive as common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) but it can still crowd out competing vegetation. I see honeysuckles more of a weed in native, wooded areas where they shade out the sapling trees. The picture to the left is one I took of Tatarian honeysuckle coming up in a Maryland forest – a big problem there. Still I would be cautious about planting these honeysuckles here if you do not want to see some coming up in your tree belts. The species and its cultivars are listed as invasive by many states for this reason. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture website notes that Tatarian honeysuckle cannot be sold or propagated in the state. However, I still see the 'Arnold Red' and

'Freedom' for sale in some Minnesota nurseries (Freedom is a 1986 University of Minnesota introduction).

As a reminder, not all honeysuckles are regarded as weeds. We even have a native honeysuckle, limber honeysuckle (*L. dioica*). This is a vining honeysuckle found in the northern Black Hills.

## E-samples

***What should I do to get the snow off my trees?***

There are a lot of trees, both evergreens and deciduous trees, that have had branches weighted down by the weekend wet snow. Several people have emailed pictures and asked what to do to help their trees.



First, lots of actions people suggest doing can result in more damage than the snow. Do not spray water on the tree to knock the snow off. The water will freeze, and the ice loading can be even heavier than the snow. Also do not shake the branches or bat them with brooms or sticks. This can cause branches to break as they swing back and forth.

Branches are more flexible than people realize, and many will just bend back into their original position once the snow melts this week. However, if a branch has bent too low, the only action that might shed some of the snow without breaking the branch is to gently push up the snow-covered branches with a pole pruner or broom and see if the snow slides off.

## **Samples received/site visits**

Perkins County

### **Is this pine wilt on Austrian pine?**

As far as we know, pine wilt has not spread this far north in the state – yet. As mentioned in previous *Updates* we have seen this disease gradually moving north as our average summer temperatures have increased. It was only on our southern border back in the early 1990s and now it is as far north as Hwy 212 so eventually it will be throughout the state.

The disease is caused by a nematode (and its associates) which disrupt the movement of water in the tree. They are introduced to a new host by being carried by sawyer beetles. Once in their new home, the nematodes usually plug up enough water-conducting tissue that the tree dies the same summer. However, we do see some Austrian pine last a little longer, sometimes into the next growing season.

The nematode is native to the United States, so the disease is a problem on our introduced pines. Scotch pine is the most susceptible and we have lost thousands of these trees during the past two decades. Austrian and mugo pines are also susceptible and we are losing many of these trees though not as quickly.

The only way to test for the nematode is through a cross-section of wood from the dying tree. These are usually cut from the lower trunk at a whorl (where the branches are attached). An increment borer can also be used to take cores from the same area but sometimes cores can miss pockets of the nematode.



The needles submitted as the sample cannot be used to diagnose pine wood nematode. The needles did present some banding, but it does not appear to be dothistroma needle blight and most looked fine. I will swing up sometime in March as I have had several reports of

declining Austrian pines in the northwestern part of the state and need to inspect some of these trees.

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