South Dakota State University Extension

Tree Pest Alert

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Samples

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

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 listing of a product shall not be taken as an endorsement or the exclusion a criticism regarding effectiveness. Please read and follow all label instructions as 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.

Reviewed by Master Gardeners: Carrie Moore and Dawnee Lebeau

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Plant development for the growing season

There were blizzards at each end of the state last week – the Black Hills and along the eastern border with Iowa. This was a very short event which yielded only a little precipitation. But any amount was welcomed.

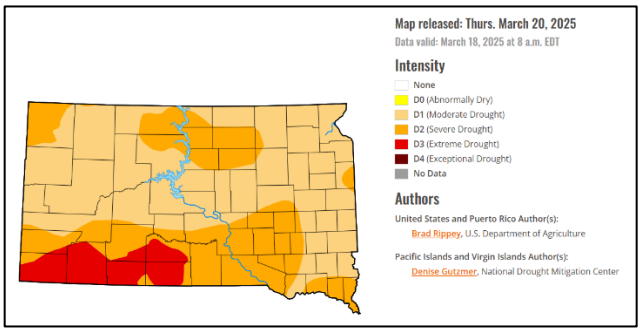
Despite the snow we have been experiencing above-average temperatures. This is slowing pushing the growing degree day (GDD-base 50) accumulation upward. This is our current accumulation for communities around the state. We are in the triple digits in some locations.

Aberdeen	56
Beresford	109
Chamberlain	121
Rapid City	84
Sioux Falls	95

One of our first flowering shrubs is Corneliancherry (*Cornus mas*). The flower buds are just beginning to open in Brookings. Despite the plant's common name, it is a dogwood, not a cherry. But it is the only common dogwood with edible fruit. The summer red fruit looks like an oblong cherry, but the taste is different. More like the easers you used to eat in grade school (not a recommended practice!)

The fruit can be made into jam – if you add enough sugar. The most valuable feature is the very early yellow flowers. These are not sensitive to frost injury and can survive freezing temperatures yet stay in bloom.

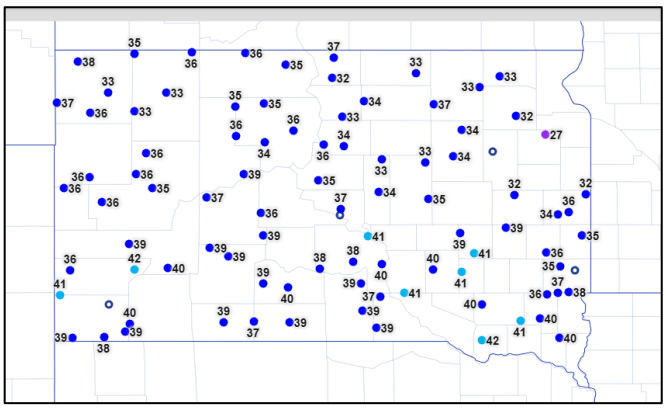
Drought monitoring



The moisture we received during the blizzards was not enough to move any part of the state out of the drought. About half the state – mostly north of I-90 - is classified as “Moderate Drought.” The rest of the state is identified as “Severe Drought” with the southwestern counties as “Extreme Drought.”

There will be a lot of mortality in windbreaks planted in 2024 unless we receive precipitation in March and April.

Soil temperatures are now in the 30s



The soil temperature has increased across the state. The entire state above 32ºF at 4-inch depth in bare-soil. Some sites are at 40ºF. We are still more than six weeks for tree planting in much of the state.

Treatments to Begin Soon

Now is the time to prune your summer flowering shrubs

Now is the time to prune your summer-flowering shrubs. These shrubs will produce their flower buds this spring as the new growth resumes. Pruning now will improve shrub health and appearance.

Shrubs should be pruned near the ground, about two to three inches, not at four feet, a common practice I refer to as “belt pruning.” Shrubs generate new canes where the cut was made so pruning at four feet creates a “top heavy” plant as the new canes appear at that height. Pruning near the ground creates a more natural form as the new canes arise near the base of the plant.

Each year about one-third of the oldest canes can be removed in this manner. This practice is called renewal pruning. It is best applied to our mound-like shrubs such as bumalda spirea (*Spiraea* x *bumulda*) and potentilla (*Potentilla*) or taller shrubs such as dogwoods (*Cornus*).

Shrubs that are more tree-like, either having a single stem like burning bush (*Euonymus alata*) are not pruned this way. They do not generate new canes from pruning cuts. Instead, this shrub should just have branches thinned out if they are too dense.

By removing one-third of the oldest stems or canes every year, you completely renew the plant every three years ensuring a continual display of attractive flowers (or in the case of the dogwoods, attractive bark).

Important note: There are spring and summer flowering spirea. Spring-flowering spirea such as vanhouttee spirea and birchleaf spirea should be pruned right after they flower in the spring, not before flowering.

Timely Topics

Emerald ash borer update

The insect is still curled in its overwinter chamber within the sapwood. We should start to see these larvae shrink and straighten as pre-pupae within the next few weeks. The pupal stage is formed in April and May. Adults should be emerging at the end of May.

Rabbit damage to shrubs

Now is the time to inspect your woody plants for rabbit damage. It has not been as noticeable as last year but still some of their favorite to browse – spirea and burning bush (pictures) = have sustained damage. The spirea can be renewal pruned (see Treatments to Begin Soon) but the burning bush may be removal of the damaged plant.

If the bunnies chewed the burning bush into the white wood and have done this completely around the stem, the plant will not survive. Pruning the shrub back to two or three inches tall – a common technique for spirea – will not work, as burning bush does not generate new stems from these cuts. Removal is the best option.

E-samples

Ice ridges forming along lake shores

Hunter, a forester with the SDDANR in Watertown, sent in this picture of trees uprooted and leaning from ice heaving along a lakeshore. The tree damage is due to the ice ridge. The ridges are caused by the pushing action of the lake ice against the shore.

This occurs mostly during dry winters when the lake ice is not blanketed with insulating snow. Cracks in the ice cause water to flow out and freeze. This causes expansion in the ice sheet which pushes against the shoreline. Alternating warm and cold periods causes more cracks and refreezing which increases the pressure of the ice along the shore. This pushes soil, rocks and even trees into a mound or ridge at the shoreline.

Samples received/Site visits

Brookings County, Poplar vagabond aphid

The call was about strange growths on the shoots of their young cottonwood. These are galls the tree forms in response to feeding by the poplar vagabond aphid (*Mordwikoja vagabunda*). The galls are about two to three inches in diameter. They were green last summer but dry out and turn brown to black after aphids emerge. Although galls are unsightly, they do not significantly harm the tree.

The old, hardened galls persist on branches for many years. The same trees are often infested year after year while neighboring trees remain free of galls. Since they do not harm the tree, no control measures are recommended.

Lawrence County, Fall cankerworm egg masses

During the last two summers, the northern Black Hills has experienced an outbreak of fall cankerworms (*Alsophila pometaria*). The caterpillars, known as loopers or inchworms, have been defoliating bur oak stands. The leaves are stripped of their soft tissue and only the veins remain. The worms are like kids who leave the crust on their toast.

Outbreaks often last two years but rarely three years. The fall cankerworm lays its eggs in the fall – hence the name fall cankerworm – so looking for egg masses in the winter can give a forecast of the severity of damage for next growing season.

The adult female cankerworms crawl out on the twigs to lay eggs during October. The eggs are very tiny, about 1/64-inch, brown-gray, vase-shaped with an encircled dot on top. The eggs are laid in masses of up to a

hundred eggs which appear as patches or may even encircle the twig.

We were able to find egg masses in an oak stand that were defoliated during the past two summers. But all the eggs were empty. The dot on top – the hatch – was missing. The eggs were hollow. These were eggs masses that hatched last year. No new egg masses were found so the outbreak may have ended.

Pennington County, Western leaf-footed (conifer-seed) bug

These insects were found crawling around in a building. They are the western leaf-footed bug. It is not an approved name but one often used. It is also known as the western conifer-seed bug. The scientific name is *Leptoglossus occidentalis.*

The adult leaf-footed bugs are identified by their leaf-like appendage on the hind legs. This species is distinguished from other left-footed bugs by its white zigzag band across the corium, the thicken base of the forewing.

The insect feeds on the green cones of ponderosa pine in the spring and other plants during the summer. They do not bite people but are a nuisance as the adults like to overwinter in buildings. They become active in the spring and start sluggishly wandering around – like we do for our morning coffee.

The only management recommendation is fixing screens and caulk cracks in outer walls to keep the insects from entering in the fall. In the spring, a vacuum is the trick. Bag them up and release them outside.

As a side note, leaf-footed bugs can resemble assassin bugs (*Zela*) which also can overwinter in houses. These insects are narrower than the leaf-footed bugs and move faster. Assassin bugs are predators on insects, including leaf-footed bugs. Assassin bugs will bite you if provoked and the bite is painful.

Yankton County, Blonding not associated with EAB

People are out in their yards with warmer weather, making it more pleasant to do the chores like removing Christmas lights from houses and trees. Anyone owning an ash tree in southeastern South Dakota is on the lookout for the early signs of emerald ash borer.

One of the early signs is blonding. This is the exposure of the lighter underlayer of bark from woodpeckers shredding the bark in their search for EAB larvae. These blonde patches will have drill holes – about pencil-diameter - from the woodpeckers.

If you pull away the bark from the area around the large drill holes in the blond patches of bark, you will find frass-filled serpentine galleries on the sapwood. Where the drill is made, the galleries will stop – the woodpeckers always get their prey.

This was not the case at the site in Yankton. There was blonding but only small chips of bark were removed. The small, chipped areas only had small pencil point size holes. These are not woodpecker drills but emergence holes of the ash bark beetle (*Hylesinus aculeatus*).

Once the bark is removed from the chipped areas, the small hibernation chambers of the ash bark beetles are easy to find. You can also find some of the adults.

There are other insects that feed in ash, ones that have been here for as long as there has been ash. These, like the ash bark beetles, are not a threat to healthy trees.