South Dakota State University Extension

Tree Pest Alert

March 18-25, 2026 (biweekly October-March) Volume 24, Number 6

In This Issue

Samples

John Ball, Professor, SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist & South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Forest Health Specialist

Email: john.ball@sdstate.edu

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

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 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

This publication made possible through a grant from the USDA Forest Service.

Plant development for the growing season

We saw a major snowstorm in the middle of March. Roads were closed in many areas of the state including stretches of I-29 and I-90. Snow accumulations in communities north of I-90 were anywhere from 5 to 20 inches. But the snow did not last long.

The GDDs accumulation doubled during the past two weeks. We saw temperatures in the 70s and 80s during this period. Many of our early spring flowering trees are in full bloom in the southern third of the state. The bright yellow flowers of the corneliancherry (*Cornus mas*) are in full bloom in Brookings. The white flowers of the serviceberries are also beginning to expand. Spring is here! But expect to see snow again – its South Dakota

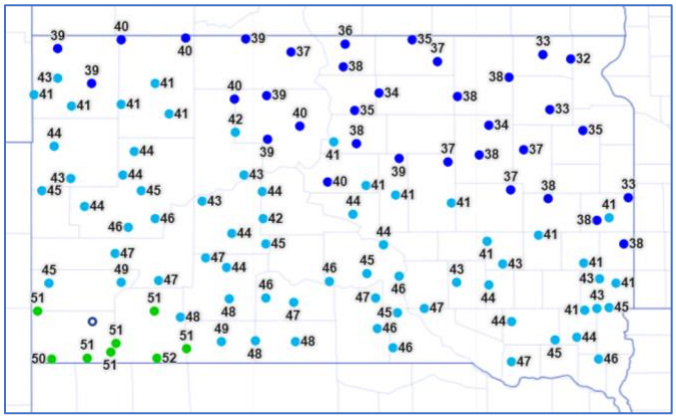
Here is the accumulation of GDD for communities around the state. We are ahead of the past several years.

Aberdeen	61
Beresford	187
Chamberlain	235
Rapid City	240
Sioux Falls	154

Soil temperatures

The soil temperatures at a 4-inch depth are continuing to climb in concert with the air temperatures. We are seeing soil warming into the low 40s in the southern and western part of the state. Still too early to start planting, but we are on target for middle of April.

One reason for the quick warming of the soil is driest. Tree planting season may start sooner than normal but the drier soils are going to require the windbreak seedlings be irrigated – at planting and throughout the season. This is a great year to install drip irrigation in new windbreaks.



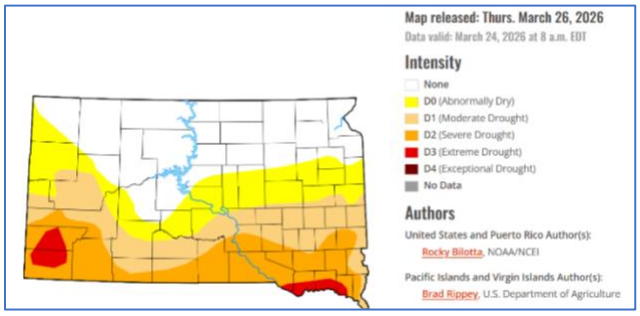
Drought monitoring

The drought-free region of the state has not changed from two weeks ago. A little less than 40% of the state, the northern one-third, is drought-free. About 20 percent of the state – a ribbon running through the middle of the state - is classified as “Abnormally Dry.”

The southern third of the state, about 19%, is classified as “Moderate Drought.” Many of the counties along the Nebraska border, about 19% of the state, are classified as “Severe Drought” which has expanded in the past two weeks.

The southern edge of Bon Homme, Clay, and Yankton counties, along with Custer and Fall River counties, are classified as “Extreme Drought.” These same counties were in a drought for much of last year.

Here is the current map from the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



Treatments to Start Soon (or Now)

Apple scab

Apple and crabapple buds will soon begin to swell, so almost time to begin fungicide treatments. The first application of fungicide is applied as the buds begin to open.

The most common fungicides used for preventative treatments of apple scab have captan or myclobutanil listed as the active ingredient. If the apple scab treatment is for an ornamental crabapple - one in which the fruit will not be harvested – chlorothalonil may also be used.

Fungicide applications are made about 7 to 10 days apart from the green tip stage until after petal fall. The weather usually turns a little drier by then and a 10-to-14-day interval can be used until the end of June.

Leaf spot on lilac

There was a widespread outbreak of leaf spot (*Pseudocercospora* or *Septoria*) on lilac last year. Defoliated lilacs were a common sight across South Dakota. While we may not have the cool, wet weather this coming late May that was responsible for infection, some folks are still asking what to spray.

The disease overwinters on the fallen leaves. Raking up and destroying all the fallen leaves beneath the lilacs may help reduce infection. But spores are easily carried by the wind so unless you rake up all the fallen lilac leaves in your township, the control may be minimal.

No fungicides are specifically labelled for leaf spot on lilacs. Propiconazole and chlorothalonil are active ingredients labeled for lilac diseases. They recommended by some extension sites for management of leaf spot diseases on lilac, but no specific testing has been done.

Zimmerman pine moth

The larvae begin moving from the winter webbing around 100 GDD so activity has started in the southern half of the state. You can find the tiny white resin mass where the young larvae are beginning to burrow into the wood. It is time to begin treatments in these areas.

The most common treatment is an application of an insecticide containing permethrin and labelled for control of this insect. The application must coat the trunk, not just fog the needles. This will kill the overwinter larvae crawling on the bark before they burrow into the tree.

Timely Topics

Emerald ash borer update

We continue to monitor larval development in ash trees. The warm air temperatures take a while for the heat to permeate the sapwood where the larvae are spending the winter. I expect we will start seeing the curved larvae shrink and straighten for their transition to pupae. This is the final resting stage before emerging as adults.

E-samples

Banded ash borer

One of the first borers to appear in the spring is the banded ash borer (*Neoclytus caprea*). This is a common borer found in declining ash trees. They are generally not the cause of the decline but are taking advantage of the low defenses of their weakened host. They can even be found in recently cut firewood. Marybeth from Stanley County sent in this picture of one.

The adult beetles are about 0.75-inches long, black to deep brown with pale yellow curved marking on the wing covers. They overwinter beneath the bark, which is unusual as most wood borers spend the winter in the larval stage. This means once we start having warm weather, the adults are out swarming.

This insect is frequently confused with emerald ash borer. Banded ash borers are often found infested ash dying from attacks by the emerald ash borer. The emerald ash borer adults are about the same length but are narrower – more torpedo-shaped – and metallic green. The emerald ash borer adults are flying between the end of May and mid-August in South Dakota.

Leaf-footed bug in chokecherry

This is the classic guilty by association. The common chokeberry is declining and this insect was found. Chokecherries are not long-lived trees. They often begin to dieback at twenty to thirty years old.

This little guy was found beneath some loose bark, but it is not the cause of the tree's decline. It was just caught snoozing for the winter. This is the eastern leaf-footed bug, a coreid bug (*Leptoglossus phyllopus*). These are plant feeding insects that live by sucking sap from their host. But they feed on crops such as sunflowers and tomatoes (and thistle!), not trees.

The name leaf-footed comes from the flattened, leaflike extensions on the hind legs. Adults are commonly found beneath loose bark at the base of trees as well as houses during the winter. If found in the home, do not smash them – they give out an unpleasant odor.

Sapsucker injury

This picture was sent in of holes in the trunk. The question was what borer was responsible for the parallel rows of holes on the trunk. This is not a borer, but a bird.

These horizontal rows of 1/4-inch holes, known as sapwells, are drilled by birds for the sap, as well as any small insects caught in the sweet liquid. Sapsuckers

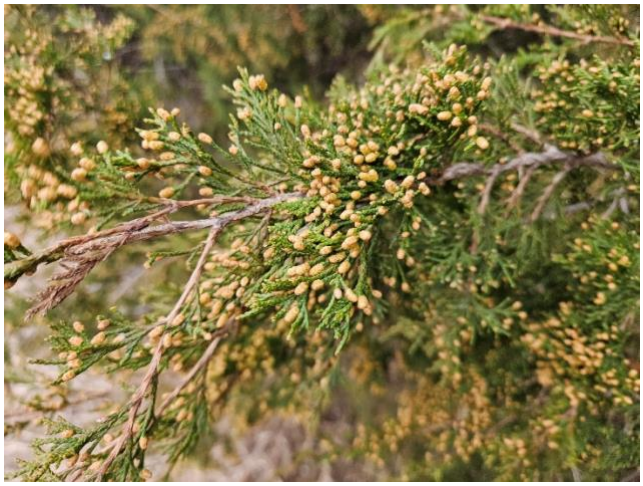
(*Sphyrapicus*) are a type of woodpecker. They are also protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty so lethal controls are not allowed.

The birds prefer thin barked trees so aspen and birch in our area are common hosts. The dark rows of sapwells are also easy to spot against the light-colored bark. The holes rarely injure the host, so it is a problem we just live with.

Samples received/Site visits

Clay County, Pollen cones forming on eastern redcedar

This was a quick spot to look at “strange galls” forming on eastern redcedars (*Juniperus viginiana*). These small (1/8-inch), yellow-brown bumps on the shoot tips are the pollen cones. They will be releasing fine, yellow, pollen dust later in April. The pollen can result in “cedar fever” for those folks with allergies.



Lincoln County, Browning spruce

A common concern is spruce turning color. Often it is just a slight brown but regardless of the intensity of the color change, the tree owner assumes it must be something that just happened. This is not necessarily so. I set the Christmas tree out as a bird feeder in January. It is just turning brown!

The browning on this spruce is mostly due to desiccation injury also referred to as winter-burn. We went into winter dry in the southeastern part of the state and then we had a dry, windy winter, the worst combination for evergreens, particularly spruce which are prone to desiccation injury.

There is nothing that can be done at this time but wait it out. Some trees will recover and either the foliage will turn green come spring or continue to brown and fall. If the buds are still plump and soft, then the chances of recovery are good. Regardless, hold off any removals until May to see if they recover.

Minnehaha County, Planting stress on a young spruce

The concern was the yellow needles on a Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*) planted last year. These

needles are on the lower branches. The shoots throughout the tree also had a “bottlebrush” appearance with density line of stunted needles.

These are common symptoms of transplant stress related to a water deficit in the trees. The treatment is watering this spring and summer to help the root recover. But only water is needed, fertilizer is not.