



# Tree Pest Alert



April 8, 2026

Volume 24, Number 8

## In This Issue

- Plant Development..... 1
- Treatments to start now ..... 2
  - Pine engraver beetle, Zimmerman pine moth ..... 2
- Timely topic..... 2
  - Emerald ash borer updates ..... 2
  - Maple tapping workshop at Sica Hollows April 18..... 3
  - Boxelder – the forgotten maple for tapping ..... 3
- E-samples ..... 4
  - Shothole borer in crabapple ..... 4
  - Split tree – can it be saved? ..... 4
  - Willow pinecone gall ..... 5
- Sample received/site visits..... 5
  - Codington County (Ash bark beetle in firewood)..... 5
  - Roberts County (Green stink bug)..... 5
  - Union County (Bird pecks in walnut) ..... 5

## Samples

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

Email: [john.ball@sdstate.edu](mailto: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

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resource and South Dakota State University are recipients of Federal funds. In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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

## Plant development for the growing season

This yo-yo weather continues across the state. Sioux Falls had a high of 64°F and a low of 0°F during the last week. Rapid City was not quite as extreme with a high of 84°F and a low of 24°F. We saw light snow in northern South Dakota. Overall, there were cool and mild temperatures this past week.

This cooler weather puts a break on plant development. The corneliancherries (*Cornus mas*) in Brookings are still in bloom (see picture). The Norway maples (*Acer plantanoides*) that usually quickly follow them are still in bud stage.



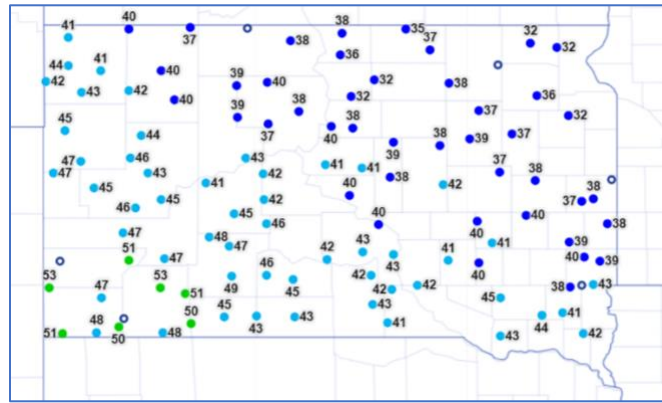
Here is the accumulation of GDD for communities around the state. We gained anywhere from 0 to 10 GDDS during the past week.

|             |     |
|-------------|-----|
| Aberdeen    | 74  |
| Beresford   | 243 |
| Chamberlain | 289 |
| Rapid City  | 288 |
| Sioux Falls | 203 |

## Soil temperatures

The soil temperatures at a 4-inch depth reflect the stagnant change in air temperatures. They did not change much during the past week. They are still sitting in the low 40s in the southern and western part of the state. Much of the rest of the state has soil temperatures in the high 30°Fs.

I know everyone is eager to start planting – garden centers are filling with stock - but the soil is just reaching the threshold for root growth. We need warm soil for roots to grow and absorb water, a prerequisite for shoot and leaf expansion. We also need soil moisture – and that is lacking. If you are planting now (in the southern half of the state), better have the hose out.

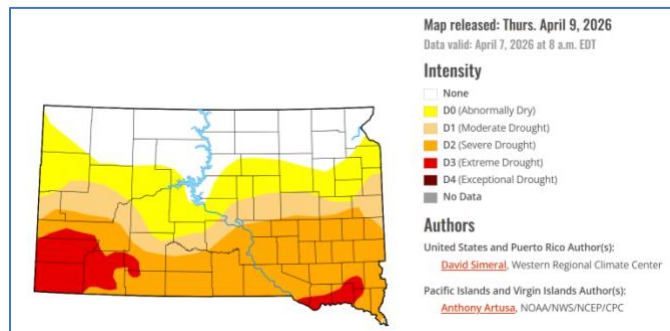


Rain would be an immense help in kicking the planting season off. The rain will warm the soil and supply the water the newly planted trees need to start root growth. Some rain is in the forecast, along with warm temperature, so I expect planting bare-root stock to start in another week or so.

### Drought monitoring

The drought-free region of the state has not changed in the past week. A little more than 25 percent of the state, the northern quarter, is drought-free. About 35 percent of the state – a ribbon running through the middle - is classified as “Abnormally Dry” or “Moderate Drought.”

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



The southern part of the state, about 40%, is classified as “Severe Drought” or “Extreme Drought.” These same counties were in a drought for much of last year. There are continual Red Flag warnings West River this spring. We need some spring rain.

## Treatments to Start Now

### Pine bark beetle sprays need to be done soon

The Black Hills have been very dry this spring. Pine engraver beetles, *Ips pini*, will take full advantage of these moisture-stressed trees. The first generation of these beetles will be flying very soon. Any protective sprays need to be put on before they fly.

These bark beetles are content to attack down trees and fresh slash piles but during drought they can move to live trees. There are also a lot of snapped trees that the population can expand in this spring before moving to live trees. The attacks, while often not as deadly as its larger cousin the mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*), can still cause branch dieback and even death of infested trees. Fortunately, droughts do not last long, a few years or so, and once the rains return the beetles move back to downed trees and slash.

But pines will be vulnerable to engraver beetles this year. High value trees need to be sprayed with sufficient pressure so that the entire canopy, trunk, and branches are covered with pesticide. This is a task best left to commercial spray companies that have the equipment and experience to do the job right.

There are many local spray companies in the Black Hills that know how to treat pines, and many started treating them in March (the pesticide will last on the bark all season). You need to be on their list now (if not already!)

### 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 to permeate into the sapwood where the larvae are curled. The trunks are also a good insulator, so the interiors do not cool down during our brief snowy periods.

We are continuing to see larva uncurl and shrink into prepupa. I expect to see pupae form in a few more weeks. Adult emergence is expected to begin in mid to

late May in Dakota Dunes and early to mid-June in Milbank.

More information on EAB lifecycles is available at:

<https://extension.sdstate.edu/sites/default/files/2023-05/P-00266.pdf>

### **Maple tapping workshop in Sica Hollow State Park on Saturday April 18**

We were out in Sica Hollow State Park starting to tap the maple trees that line the north-facing slopes within the park. Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) forests are exceedingly rare in the region. This is the only one in South Dakota – it is truly a hidden gem in our state.



Some authorities consider these trees not sugar maples, but black maples (*Acer nigrum*). Others say black maple is a subspecies of sugar maple (*Acer saccharum* var *nigrum*). Regardless, the leaves of the maples in Sica Hollow are a little thicker, almost leathery, and often three-lobed, rather than the 5-lobes found on sugar maple. But whatever you call these trees – they can make great syrup!



The sap season has just begun in Sica Hollow State Park. The ground is still blanketed in snow, but the day temperatures are in the 50s and 60s – the perfect recipe for sap to flow. We harvested about a gallon and a half in one day in each of the tapped trees!

JOIN US FOR A HANDS-ON

## MAPLE TAPPING WORKSHOP



**RESCHEDULED:**  
**SATURDAY, 18 APRIL 2026**

START FROM 11:00AM - 2:00 PM  
SICA HOLLOW STATE PARK  
44950 PARK ROAD, SISSETON, SD 57260

LIVE DEMONSTRATIONS | EXPERT-LED SESSIONS | SAMPLES WILL BE AVAILABLE | LUNCH PROVIDED

SCAN HERE TO REGISTER: 

THIS WORKSHOP WAS SUPPORTED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA) ACER ACCESS AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (GRANTS 23ACERUT028-00 AND 23ACERUT055)

There will be a maple tapping workshop at Sica Hollow State Park on Saturday, April 18 from 11 am to 2 pm. There will be demonstrations of the tube system for collecting saps. The group will meet at the **Upper Campground Day Use Area** at 11 am Saturday.

There will be tours of the tube system and demonstrations of tapping. There will also be some maple sap treats!

### **Boxelder – the forgotten maple for tapping**

While we were concentrating on tapping the sugar maples in Sica Hollows State Park, we did tap a boxelder (*Acer negundo*). The sap flow was as much as the sugar maples. It was pouring out while we were drilling. The tree had about 1.5 gallons of sap in one bucket during a 24-hour period.

The group tasted the sap out of the bucket. It was described as earthy and not as sweet. A nice favor but not the same as sugar maples.

There is less sugar in boxelder sap. Sometimes only 2% compared to 3% or more for sugar maple. This means you must boil down the sap more to make a syrup, maybe 50 gallons of sap for a gallon of syrup. But the syrup is just as good as other maple syrups.



The color is more amber for boxelder syrup. The flavor of the syrup is a very pleasant butterscotch. It is good enough that boxelder syrup is often marketed as Manitoba maple syrup.

## E-samples

### Shothole borer in apple

The holes in this crabapple trees, along with the irregular galleries, appear to be the work of the shothole borer (*Scolytus rugulosus*). This insect is usually content to live in dying wood but will attack stressed fruit trees given an opportunity. They can spot moisture-stressed trees before you can!



The borer attacks trunks and branches of its host. All the inner bark is converted to dust due to the high density of larvae burrowing within. Birds also like this easy source of food and will peck the bark away in search of a meal of larvae.

The best treatment of infested trees is removal. The tree is dying – the borers (and birds) are just telling you that.

### Split tree – can it be saved?

This was an image of a cedar (Juniper) that split in a recent storm. The question was, could the tree be saved? The short answer is no. But perhaps there is a chance.

There is nothing we can do for the wound to “heal.” Trees do not heal the way we do; tissue does not generate to repair the damage. Instead, trees enclose the wound – but the wound is always there.

The best approach is to cleanly cut away any torn bark or wood then just leave the wound open. In time – perhaps a decade – the wound will be enclosed. This does not mean the tree will survive. The wound injury will always be a weak spot and may snap at this point during wind or snow loading.



I would leave the tree as long as the tree will not hit anything if it does fall.

## **Willow pinecone gall**

I was sent this picture from Rapid City. This is not a pine cone and the tree they are on is a willow. This is the willow pinecone gall. It is the result of feeding by a small fly, a midge (*Rhabdophaga strobiloides*). While the galls do resemble pinecones with closed scales, these are deformed terminal buds on willow shoots.



The adult midge lays a single egg on the expanding tip in the spring. The egg hatches the young larvae begins feeding. As it feeds and the distorted tissue forms around it. They do not feed on all terminal buds, usually just a few random buds on a plant.

The gall does not harm the willow host. Think of the gall as bonus ornaments on the shrub.

---

## **Samples received/Site visits**

### **Codington County, Ash bark beetles emerging from firewood**

This is the adult ash bark beetle (*Hylesinus aculeatus*) a close relative to the elm bark beetles hence the similar appearance. The adults hibernate in the outer bark, usually in large branches. They emerge in the spring to lay eggs in susceptible hosts – recently dead and dying white or green ash trees.



The warmer basement is resulting in emerging a little earlier than normal. They cannot harm anything in the house but may become an annoyance for a couple of weeks (much like the Asian ladybeetles) while they are trying to find a way out.

### **Roberts County, Green stink bug**

This was not a stop to look at an insect, but a chance occurrence as we were tapping maple trees. This large (1/2-inch long) green insect was found in the litter leaf beneath bur oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*) and basswood (*Tilia americana*) on a south-facing slope.



This is the green stink bug (*Chinava hilaris*). It is a native insect that inhabits woodlands and apple orchards. The stink bug is also found, and is a problem, in a variety of crops including soybean and tomatoes. Green stink bugs can also be a problem in grapes. The insect inserts its beak into grapes, liquefying them into a gooey mess.

The insect overwinters as an adult. Eggs are laid in clusters on expanding leaves in the spring. Basswood leaves are a favorite ovipositing site. The eggs hatch in a week. The nymphs feed on foliage and fruit, sucking sap from the plant tissue.

The name stink bug comes from the defenses of the insect. They release a foul odor from their abdominal glands when disturbed. This is a defense from birds and small mammals.

### **Union County, Birdpecks in walnut**

These bird pecks were probably made by the yellow-breasted sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*). This bird will 'tap' walnuts for their sap. Walnut trees along with birch and maple produce a clear, sweet sap in late winter and early spring. The bird produce a series of holes that may go around the tree and if they decide the sap is tasty enough will produce a second and even a third ring of holes around the tree.



The sweet sap that drips out of the wounds also attracts a number of insects and these are often mistakenly considered the reason for the holes. The wounds do not harm the walnut tree but can affect the appearance of the wood so are a problem for walnut plantation managers.

There has been a little, very little, interest in tapping black walnuts for their sap as is done with maples, and however this is not likely to become popular. McCrory Gardens has taps some of their walnuts in past years. It is a grittier sap so takes more filtering.

The taste may not quite be worth the work, but I leave that to the reader to decide. The flavor has been described as burnt and bitter, but so can my coffee. Apparently many people like the taste of a darker, woodier syrup. There is a growing market in walnut syrup.