

# ORNAMENTALS

• H O T L I N E •

March 17, 2017

Issue 1

## INSECTS

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Normally, a warm winter like we have experienced this year would give insects an early start or better survival through the season. We begin tracking growing degree days (GDD) on 1 March, but on occasion the first two months of the year provide some GDD. For example, by the end of February this year, the farm at UD in Newark has had 50 GDD<sub>50</sub>. The cold temperatures over the past week may temporarily reduce populations, or slow development of some species. Effects of winter temperatures on insect abundance for an upcoming growing season are difficult to predict, and are often species specific. Some species are better protected from the environment, or may not have begun their springtime activity. Temperatures and environmental conditions closer to an insect's start of activity may provide better indicators to a species abundance for a growing season compared to winter temperatures. This winter may or may not have impact on insect populations; however, I suspect we may see some springtime insect activity sooner than normal based on the year-to-date GDD. The further we get into spring the less of a factor the warm winter will probably have on insects.

The ice in the storm this week caused limbs to break on many trees in Newark. In addition, many trees had already bloomed or had buds about to open. The cold temperatures stressed many of our trees, and this may make them vulnerable to insect attack later in the spring or summer. Such trees should be closely monitored throughout the season for signs of borer attack (e.g. cherry trees and bark beetles) or higher than normal scale infestations.

Early insects to watch for include eastern tent caterpillars, aphids, white pine weevils, and bark beetles. Female bark beetles typically fly after three days of consecutive 70°F days without rain. Apply bark sprays to protect trees at this time.

## DISEASES

Nancy Gregory  
Plant Diagnostician

EARLY 2017 WEATHER HAS BEEN WILD so far. We have had fluctuating temperatures. We had very little snow cover, although we have had good rainfall leading to adequate soil moisture. Now we have ice on branches and broken branches. Many trees, shrubs, and bulb crops came out early, and have been hit by the freezing weather. Frost/freeze damage occurs when ice forms inside the plant tissue and injures the plant cells. We have had prolonged freezing temperatures this week. The rate of thawing, and repeated freezing and thawing also has adverse effects on plant

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## *What's Hot!*

Review your records from last year to note problem spots and key pests/key plants to focus on in this year's scouting.

Diseases in the greenhouse can lead to problems with cuttings and seedlings this season. Make sure stock plants are healthy, scout for diseases and pests, and discard affected plants. Control insects that vector plant viruses.

Monitor soil temperatures for weed preemergent application. Several days at 55 F can mean the start of the season. Japanese stilt grass preemergent should go down prior to crabgrass. We usually say crabgrass control should be applied when forsythia bloom - and they are blooming! When you apply early, it is a good idea to split the treatment so you get a longer window of coverage.

Upcoming Course at UDBG - Exciting World of Hydrangeas; Tuesday, March 21, 7:00 pm; located in The Commons, Townsend Hall; cost is UDBG Friends Members: \$10; Nonmembers: \$15. To register email [botanicgardens@udel.edu](mailto:botanicgardens@udel.edu) or phone 302-831-2517.

For the first two issues of Ornamentals Hotline, we will mail to all 2016 subscribers. If you haven't resubscribed, please send in your check today, so you don't get dropped from the list.

*For more information*

on pests & practices covered in this newsletter, call your County Extension Office

Helpful numbers to know:



Garden Line (for home gardeners only)	831-8862
New Castle County Extension	831-2506
Kent County Extension	730-4000
Sussex County Extension	856-7303

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## Diseases (Continued)

cells. For that reason, we always say that trees and shrubs would prefer if it turned cold in the winter and stayed cold! Most of the shrubs will put out new growth, and even if flowering has been affected, the long-term health of the plants will not be.

Do not break ice off branches; allow it to thaw on its own. Do not prune now, because that will encourage new buds to break before it is time. Prune only if you have broken branches that need to come off. Prune those back to the branch collar swelling, do not leave a stub. One concern is fruit trees, because stone fruits such as peaches, plums, and nectarines only have one flush of flowers and buds all open at the same time. You can examine buds of peach and other fruits. Take some representative twigs from the orchard or planting, examine the ovule in the center of each flower bud, and count the number of buds or healthy flower centers. Healthy flower parts should be light green and affected parts will be dark colored. Compare this number per fruiting lateral to your desired crop load. If, for example, you have eight to ten live flower buds on a fruiting lateral that should carry three peaches at harvest, then you have more than enough live flower buds to produce a good crop.



Magnolia bud affected by freezing temperatures.  
Photo credit: N. Gregory

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Editor: Susan Barton  
Extension Horticulturist

