



# NEWS RELEASE

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## Bur oak blight spreading concern in the Midwest

Signs of disease are showing up on more bur oaks in the Midwest.

Bur oak blight, or BOB for short, is a newly identified native disease that causes late season leaf browning.

Symptoms of BOB include darkened veins and large wedge-shaped brown areas. Some leaves can turn totally brown.

The blight has been found only on a northern variety of bur oak called *Quercus macrocarpa* var. *oliviformis* to date. This common variety has relatively small acorns and is especially adapted to upland sites with shallow soils.

The US Forest Service is working closely with several state agencies and Iowa State University to collect and analyze samples and determine the distribution of BOB within the Midwest.

The disease is widespread in Iowa and Minnesota; it extends into some counties in Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. The known distribution of BOB roughly coincides with that of the affected bur oak variety.

"We've done survey work in Minnesota and Iowa, and we've found it to be widespread in both states," said Jill Pokorny, a US Forest Service plant pathologist in St. Paul, Minn.

More focused survey work has been done in South Dakota, North Dakota, Wisconsin and Missouri. Researchers found BOB in each of those states, she added, though only a few counties have been surveyed to date.

"As we continue to look, we'll likely find it in other states and counties across the Midwest," she said.

Sufficient early spring rains in 2011 and 2012 maintained the elevated BOB levels that have been observed for the last decade, said Tom Harrington, a plant pathologist at Iowa State University.

"There's been a documented shift in climate in Iowa, particularly an increase in rainfall during the early spring. That's what we think is causing an increase in this disease," he added.

With the recent intense summer drought throughout the Midwest States, it can sometimes be difficult to determine whether the leaf browning is caused by early host leaf color change or by the BOB disease.

Several consecutive years of severe BOB may weaken the tree. Over time some BOB-infected trees die, usually as their branches are attacked and killed by a native wood borer, the two-lined chestnut borer, which attacks weakened trees.

Removing dead oak trees and large, dead branches may help reduce populations of wood borers, which may slow the decline of trees showing severe BOB symptoms. Fungicide treatments can also be an option for controlling the disease in high value trees.

The disease tends to intensify from year to year in individual trees. BOB symptoms usually start in the lower branches and then progress up the tree. Disease progression is slow, however, and it takes several to many years for the disease to spread throughout the tree and become severe.

Bur oak is a very important tree species in woodlands and surviving oak savannahs. They are highly valued in residential landscapes.

Contact your state forest health specialist if you see symptoms of BOB or have questions.

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On the Net: <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~tcharrin/BOB.html>