CAES
The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
Putting Science to Work for Society since 1875

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PRESS RELEASE
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CAES Asks Residents to Scout for Laurel Wilt on Sassafras and Spicebush

New Haven – In August of 2026, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) confirmed a report of symptomatic sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) trees in Fairfield County, CT. Testing of infected material resulted in a positive for *Harringtonia lauricola*, known as **laurel wilt**. Laurel wilt is an introduced fungal disease that has impacted forests of the eastern United States. This pathogen now poses a threat to the forests of Connecticut by killing plants in the Laurel family like sassafras and spice bush (*Lindera benzoi*n), which provide benefits to our state's ecosystem. Despite the name, this disease does not harm mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*).

Symptoms of laurel wilt, from left to right: Drooping reddish brown leaves and dark streaks underneath bark on sapwood
Source: CT Agricultural Experiment Station

The disease is spread by redbay ambrosia beetles (*Xyleborus glabratus*) and firewood movement. Beetles that enter susceptible plants spread the fungus which causes wilting and plant death within weeks to months. CAES is working closely with the CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection to survey symptomatic trees and trap for redbay ambrosia beetles that may create more opportunities for laurel wilt to spread.

Symptoms of Laurel Wilt:

- Early infected plants have drooping leaves that wilt and turn brown
- Infected plants will have dark streaks on the sapwood under the bark
- Redbay ambrosia beetles entering plants may leave "toothpick" sized strings of sawdust and frass

If a Connecticut resident sees wilting or dying sassafras or spicebush, please report your findings using our online reporting tool or by emailing CAES.StateEntomologist@ct.gov and dispose of the material following the guidance below:

What You Can Do:

- Report your findings by emailing CAES.StateEntomologist@ct.gov or using the online reporting tool, https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/cd88aecff65948e795bac5f34e1b66d2
- Cut down laurel wilt-affected sassafras or spicebush
- Do not move any wood material from infected plants from the property
- Chip trees and try to cover chips with a tarp for at least a week
- Always use local firewood
- Link to factsheet from Cornell University: https://tinyurl.com/ujy39hwx

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