

Rust Disease Defoliates the “blow-over” Senna, *Senna surattensis*

Doug Caldwell and Stephen Brown



A healthy, upright floriferous *Senna surattensis*.



Completely defoliated victims of the brown *Ravenelia* rust disease.

Senna surattensis is commonly called *glaucous cassia* in the trade or simply ‘cassia tree’ by many others. It is frequently planted along roadways and in gardens and community landscapes as a small ornamental flowering tree-shrub. This tree-shrub flowers its panicles off, depending on the plant, there is variation from plant to plant, but you can probably get 8 to 10 months of yellow flowers. This will also vary depending on genetics, fertilizer, moisture and pruning techniques.

This tree-shrub is known to be top-heavy and for its tendency to be weak-rooted. After Hurricanes Charley (2004) and Wilma (2005) and subsequent wind-storms, it has literally “fallen” out of favor and is not used as much.

During November 2012 through January of 2013, a rust disease caused by a fungus, *Ravenelia* sp., is causing severe leaf, flower, stem and branch die-back. The problem has been reported widespread throughout south Florida on both the east and west coasts. *Ravenelia* rust is not new to the area as it has been previously reported. And, normally, the disease has been fairly mild, only causing leaf drop. However, during this year’s brief cool season, severe defoliation and twig dieback has occurred. Stephen Brown reports 80% of the sennas



Glaucous senna in its typical position following a strong breeze from Hurricane Charley in Lee County.



Early leaf spotting due to the *Ravenelia* rust fungus.

Photo Credit: Stephen Brown, Lee County UF-IFAS



The rust disease at an advanced stage, note larger leaf spots and twig die-back.



Close-up of senna rust fruiting bodies and spores.

have been defoliated in Lee County. Because this plant tends to look ratty and thin after cold spells, this rust disease may have been at work in the past but overlooked (by me anyway!).

Additional laboratory analyses are ongoing to gather more information on this disease. At this point, January 18, new growth is pushing out and the trees may recover. If you would like to use a fungicide, products such as Bayleton, Banner, Heritage or Pageant have been suggested by plant pathologist, Dr. Aaron Palmateer, with the University of Florida. Reapply applications per label directions. Another cure, in my opinion, is cut them down. Structurally they are an inferior plant species and don't hold up when the strong winds blow.



Support pole and cords need to be removed after 6 to 12 months. This tree is close to being girdled by the very people who sought to save it

Also, for some reason people don't remove the hardware from these plants after they have been propped up after a "blow over" event, like a car going by at 20 MPH. Another reason they may be defoliating is because they are strangled by the girdling wire and twine and stakes which should have been removed/adjusted within 6 to 12 months after they were staked. 🌱

Doug Caldwell is a Certified Arborist and the commercial horticulture extension agent and landscape entomologist with the University of Florida Collier County Extension Service. The Cooperative Extension Service is an off-campus branch of the University of Florida, Institute of the Food and Agricultural Sciences and a department of the Public Services Division of Collier County government. E-mail dougbug@ufl.edu Extension programs are open to all persons without regard to race, color, creed, sex, handicap or national origin. For updates on the southwest Florida horticulture visit: <http://collier.ifas.ufl.edu>