

Bugs and Shrubs Buzz

by Doug Caldwell, "Dr. Dougbug"

Laurel Wilt Disease of Red Bay and Avocado is Killing Trees



A resident called me in early January to express concern that many of his Laurel Oaks were dying and wanted to do what he could to stop the plague. I thought that was odd as there aren't any oak plagues, yet, in south Florida. Then I thought, "Hey, the leaves of Swamp Bay resemble Laurel Oak; maybe it is Laurel, or aka Red Bay, Wilt Disease." A visit to the property in Naples, near the local airport, confirmed it was Swamp Bays that were dying from this fungal disease that is spread by ambrosia beetles.



Evidence of Red Bay Wilt Disease include these cigarette-ash-like protrusions which accumulate if there is minimal rain and wind. The ambrosia beetles clean their tunnels of the sawdust which sticks together due to the fungal growth inside.



Know your plants: Since identification of the host is important in figuring out what pests you have, here are some identification tips! Laurel Oak leaves, *Quercus laurifolia*, (top and bottom left) are very similar to Swamp Red Bay leaves, *Persea palustris*, (top and bottom right). They both have entire margins, about 2.5-3" long, and a yellowish midvein. The *Persea* underside is lighter waxy-green (bottom right). *Persea* leaves also have a lemon bay leaf fragrance when crushed. Oak leaves do not have such volatiles!



Another easy way to distinguish between oak leaves and bay (*Persea spp.*) leaves are the occasional psyllid galls on the *Persea spp.* leaves (center globose objects). You might have also noticed the leafcutter bees activity (holes).



The two common *Persea* species are separated by the characteristics as shown above by Stephen Brown, UF/IFAS Lee Co. Ext.



Dying avocado tree. Picture: Ag Professional, Brad Buck UF/IFAS.

This disease is also killing avocado trees. 25,000 avocado trees have been killed, about 3% of total trees (2017 report). See more info at FDAC site: <http://tinyurl.com/hgezuy5> and Tampa Tribune article: <http://tinyurl.com/jmbvdt8>

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