

## Canker Stain of Plane

Whilst its common name sounds the beginning of a popular tongue-twister, the reality of the disease featured in this week's technical article is rather more sobering. *Ceratocystis platani*, which may also be referred to as plane wilt disease, is a serious threat to several plane species, including London plane (*Platanus x acerifolia*) and its parents, *Platanus orientalis* and *Platanus occidentalis*.

### Origins and Distribution

The fungus is believed to originate from America, but was introduced to Europe during World War II. Since this introduction, the spread of *Ceratocystis platani* has been sporadic. Whilst it has travelled to some countries and caused significant tree losses, other European countries have been largely unaffected. Most significant for stakeholders in the UK, however, is the fact that *Ceratocystis platani* is now in Italy, France and Greece, and responsible for notable tree fatalities.

### Spread

The reason for the concern is the ease with which *Ceratocystis platani* may spread between host trees. The fungus can infect specimens through wounds in bark or stems as well as root-to-root contact.

Human activity may lead to spread of infection, and all equipment should be considered:

- Vehicles
- Clothing
- Planting tools and machinery
- Chainsaws, pruning equipment and associated equipment such as chippers

For this reason, good biosecurity should be adhered to.

Longer-distance spread of *Ceratocystis platani* is possible via imported infected planting stock and materials.

### Symptoms

Early symptoms of *Ceratocystis platani* usually manifest in the foliage, where leaves may wilt (hence the name plant wilt disease) and become yellowed.

As the fungus spreads, it may disrupt the water transport system of the tree and cause cankers. Whilst these cankers may be recognisable only as longitudinal cracks on larger, thicker barked trees, removal of the bark will reveal staining - hence the name 'Canker stain of plane'. The images below, show the cracking visible as part of the canker, as well as the dark-coloured spots, characteristic of the fungus. Both images are used courtesy of the Forestry Commission.



Trees affected by the fungus decline rapidly and, unfortunately, there is no effective treatment available at present. Infected limbs should be removed and burnt.

#### **Further action**

At present, *Ceratocystis platani* is not in the UK. Thanks to EU legislative changes, the UK is now regarded as a 'protected zone' for *Ceratocystis platani*. What this means for commercial buyers, is that plane trees must not be introduced to the UK from overseas, unless they have been grown in an area free from *Ceratocystis platani* and are accompanied by a plant passport to certify this.

Please ensure that, if you are purchasing plane trees from a nursery or wholesaler, you ask to see the plant passport for plane trees on your purchase order.

Suspected cases of *Ceratocystis platani* should be reported to the Forestry Commission via its tree alert page: [www.forestry.gov.uk/treealert](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/treealert)

#### **Further reading**

Forestry Commission contingency plan for *Ceratocystis platani*:

[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/CplatanicontingencyplanforpublicationSept2016.pdf/\\$FILE/CplatanicontingencyplanforpublicationSept2016.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/CplatanicontingencyplanforpublicationSept2016.pdf/$FILE/CplatanicontingencyplanforpublicationSept2016.pdf)

Forestry Commission webpage 'Threats to plane trees'

<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/bee-h-9ruekf>