

Phytophthora ramorum on Japanese larch in South West England

Purpose

1. This note is an update on the developing situation regarding the outbreak of *Phytophthora ramorum* on Japanese larch in South West England. The outbreak affects Forestry Commission woodlands and woodlands owned by others.

Background

2. The quarantine disease *Phytophthora ramorum* was first found in the UK in 2002. In the wider environment it has largely been associated with Rhododendron species that act as a host from which spores are produced. When produced in sufficient quantity these can infect trees and other plants in the vicinity. Control efforts in woodlands have focussed primarily on removing Rhododendron. The Forestry Commission, Forest Research and the Food and Environment Research Agency have been working together to survey, study and control the disease.
3. In August 2009 *Phytophthora ramorum* was confirmed on *Rhododendron ponticum* in the understorey of mature Japanese larch, and also on the foliage of thicket stage Japanese larch in an adjoining compartment in SW England.
4. Subsequent testing at sites in north and west Devon and west Somerset has confirmed the presence of *Phytophthora ramorum* in mature Japanese larch as well as species in its understorey, including Rhododendron, Sweet chestnut, beech, birch, oak and Western hemlock. On some sites there is little or no Rhododendron present. These findings and those made on the Japanese larch highlight a significant change in the dynamics of the disease experienced to date. Previously tree infection has only taken place in the proximity of infected Rhododendron.

What FC are doing in South West England

5. Forestry Commission staff, Forest Research scientists, Food and Environment Research Agency and others are working very hard to better understand the changes that are being experienced.
6. Actions taken to date include:
 - Ongoing investigations of tree symptoms being carried out by Forest Research scientists;
 - Susceptibility testing of Japanese larch logs to *Phytophthora ramorum* (and also to a similar but distantly related disease *Phytophthora kernoviae*) by Forest Research scientists;

Phytophthora Update

- Molecular DNA analysis of spore levels on infected sites by Food and Environment Research Agency scientists;
- Further survey of Rhododendron by Food and Environment Research Agency followed up with funded Rhododendron clearance agreements where appropriate;
- Continued vigilance in woodlands managed by the Forestry Commission.

What FC Wales are doing in Wales

7. This winter undertake a local survey on the Assembly Government woodland estate in stands that has Rhododendron as an understory.
8. Undertake a formal survey of Japanese larch sites in Wales on the Assembly Government woodland estate in spring 2010.
9. FC Wales to check all harvesting coupes containing Japanese larch where harvesting is planned before next spring.
10. Implement biosecurity measures for all machine movements into Wales from SW England.
11. Grants & Regulations staff to implement biosecurity measures for all site visits.

Symptoms

12. Information on *Phytophthora ramorum* symptoms experienced to date is widely available on the Forestry Commission's website www.forestry.gov.uk/pramorom. On Japanese larch, shoots and foliage can be affected and are visible as wilted, withered shoot tips with blackened needles. The infected shoots shed their needles prematurely. Trees with branch dieback may have numerous cankers on their branches and upper trunk that can bleed resin. Please see symptoms handout.
13. As Japanese larch along with other deciduous species has now lost its foliage, symptoms are very difficult to see. This is also likely to be a period of reduced disease activity. During the winter Rhododendron will still exhibit symptoms, so it is important to monitor this as an indicator of disease where it occurs in conjunction with Japanese larch.

What should woodland owners and managers do?

14. Look on the Forestry Commission website www.forestry.gov.uk/pramorom for more information and familiarise yourself with the symptoms and other details.
15. Maintain vigilance and regularly inspect your woods particularly where Japanese larch and/or Rhododendron or Sweet chestnut is present. Please note that we are

Phytophthora Update

primarily concerned with plantations of Japanese larch in forests and woodland in relation to this change in the disease dynamics.

16. Implement basic biosecurity measures ensuring that all machinery moved into Wales from SW England is thoroughly cleaned.
17. If you suspect your woodland may be infected or suspicious symptoms are present, please report it to Forestry Commission Wales Grants & Regulations Office at Clawdd Newydd, Ruthin, Denbighshire, LL15 2NL Tel: 0845 604 0845, e-mail: con.nw@forestry.gsi.gov.uk. The 0845 604 0845 Contact Centre telephone number will change to 0300 068 0300 from 23rd November 2009.
18. The details you will be asked for will include:
 - Name and address;
 - Contact telephone and email;
 - Location of the woodland concerned (Grid reference or postcode or nearest town);
 - Approximate area and age of the Japanese larch;
 - Approximate area of Rhododendron (if present);
 - Is the Rhododendron (if present) showing symptoms?
 - Is there sweet chestnut present?
 - Approximate date when symptoms were first noticed.
19. If you are concerned about an individual garden, parkland or amenity tree then you should contact the Forest Research Tree Health Diagnostic Advisory Service on 01420 23000 or visit www.forestresearch.gov.uk/ddas.



***Phytophthora ramorum* Symptoms in
*Rhododendron ponticum***

- Wilt and dieback of fresh growth
- Shoot dieback extending down from growing tip often giving a “crook” effect
- Dieback extending from the stem of leaf down the mid-rib and also on the leaf tip - i.e. wherever water collects
- Watery appearance to dieback. On the underside of the leaf infection tend to follow the cell structure and does not have a clearly defined edge