

## MADRONES IN DISTRESS

Diane Threlkeld

Most of you are familiar with *arbutus menziesii*, better known as the Pacific madrone. I first learned of it from my son years ago when he went off to college in Humboldt County, CA. It quickly became his favorite tree, not surprising since Humboldt is home to one of the largest Pacific madrones (the Council Madrona) at 96 feet tall and over 10 feet across. My husband and I later bought a cottage on Salt Spring Island, BC and really fell in love with this west coast native. Now we're enjoying them in their Olympic Peninsula habitat.

But I've noticed some of these twisting trees, known for their shedding bark and showy flowers, weren't looking quite so dapper. A couple of younger formerly healthy madrones in Port Townsend developed a worsening leaf blight that resulted in madrone limbs with a few brown, if any, leaves. I was intrigued by what I saw. Other folks have been too.

Dr. Marianne Elliott, Plant Pathologist at WSU Puyallup, has determined a cold temperature pathogen (*Phaciidiopycnis washingtonensis*) is responsible for much of the damaged leaves. She also thinks the unusually cold weather has been a key factor. Elliott is looking for your help to map this foliar blight in the western US, "What we would really like to know is where the trees that have 'escaped' the blight are so we can study them." For more information, contact Dr. Elliott at [melliott2@wsu.edu](mailto:melliott2@wsu.edu).

So what should we do?

Don't do anything. Don't water or fertilize them; they're used to our dry summers. Don't damage the trees or roots or disturb the soil. They're our natives – let them be. The prognosis is still a guessing game. If our periods of colder average temperature are a factor, warmer temperatures next winter might reduce the problem and plants can recover. The foliar blight has affected the 2010 foliage; you may not see these symptoms on new 2011 growth. The good news? Madrone seeds generally germinate well in sunny, well-drained locations, so the future of the Pacific madrone isn't at risk.

Information sources:

Dr. Marianne Elliott, Plant Pathologist, WSU Puyallup,

[http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/ppo/madrone/diseases/foliar\\_blight\\_2011.htm](http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/ppo/madrone/diseases/foliar_blight_2011.htm)

[http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/ppo/madrone/diseases/foliar\\_blight\\_2011\\_comments.htm](http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/ppo/madrone/diseases/foliar_blight_2011_comments.htm)

"Plant Disease Control," Oregon State University Extension, <http://plant-disease.ippc.orst.edu/>

"Pacific Madrone/Madrone," <http://www.colvoscreeknursery.com/>