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Pitch Canker Disease on Pines Can Be Serious

A disease to be aware of in pine trees, and conifers in general, is a fungal disease called Pitch Canker. This is a common pine tree fungal disease of the Southeast which has also been identified in Brevard County. Pitch Canker is caused by *Fusarium circinatum*. Various strains of *Fusarium* affect vegetables, notably tomatoes, causing wilt symptoms typically on one side of the plant. *Fusarium* wilt (*F. oxysporum*) is seen on some palm species with the initial symptoms appearing initial symptoms on one side of the palm, also called a “one-sided wilt”, before spreading to the rest of the palm. Symptoms can vary depending on variety, but typically on southern pine trees, researchers describe pitch canker symptoms not as a “one-sided wilt” but as “flagging”. This means that enough needles turn brown and stand out among the other green needles throughout the tree. This disease can affect all parts of the pine at any growth stage, from seeds to mature trees.

In general, cankers cause the browning and dieback on stems and branches as the fungus breaks down the bark and vascular tissue to where it no longer properly transports water and nutrients. Cankers of other fungi species cause similar damage to a number of other trees and shrubs in both natural and landscape settings. Unfortunately, cankers are not curable - once the disease is in the plant, only physical removal is recommended. In urban landscapes, one way to slow down the spread of a canker disease is to mechanically cut the infected portion out to help prevent the spread of the disease. Planting varieties more resistant to pitch canker, limiting excessive nitrogen applications, and using fungicides may help slow the spread of fungal spores from one branch to another. For more information on this subject, click on the link below or contact your local UF/IFAS Extension office.

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FR/FR29800.pdf>



Figure 1. Slash pine sapling infected with pitch canker, resin on the outside stem. (Photo by Tyler Dreaden). 2010.



Figure 2. Typical flagging on longleaf pine with showing the pitch canker. (Photo by Jason Smith). 2010.