

Bacterial leaf scorch

Xylella fastidiosa (bacterium)

This recently identified disease has the potential to cause major damage to highbush blueberries in the southeastern United States.



Symptoms. The initial symptom is marginal leaf scorch (burn), resembling drought symptoms or fertilizer salt burn. A dark band may be visible between healthy and scorched tissue. Scorching at first is limited to individual stems, but later affects the entire plant. After leaf drop, yellowed stems and twigs are very visible on the skeleton-like bush. Canes and roots appear healthy. Plant death can be relatively rapid, usually in the second season after symptoms appear. Neighboring plants may show symptoms. Plant stress may play a role in disease development.



Cultivar FL86-19 has proven to be the most susceptible, although cv. Star is also susceptible.



Disease

cycle. *Xylella*

fastidiosa infects numerous plant species and appears restricted to warm regions. Grasses and herbaceous weeds likely form a reservoir for infection. The bacteria can only survive in plant xylem or insect vectors. In spring to early summer, sharpshooters and spittle bugs transmit bacteria to healthy plants after feeding on infected tissues. Bacteria multiply in and plug up xylem vessels, preventing water and nutrient flow. Bacteria probably also spread through cuttings.

Management. Remove and destroy infected plants; do not take cuttings from infected plants; avoid susceptible cultivars; monitor and manage vectors with foliar or soil-applied insecticides.