



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE • BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY**  
LESTER SPELL, JR., D.V.M., COMMISSIONER  
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**For Immediate Release**

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**Disease Killing Redbay Trees Makes First Appearance in Mississippi**

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) and Mississippi Forestry Commission have confirmed the positive identification of laurel wilt disease in Jackson County, where the disease was discovered killing redbay trees in late July.

Dr. Lester Spell, Jr., MDAC Commissioner, and Charlie Morgan, Forestry Commission State Forester, will lead a joint effort to determine the extent of the disease and minimize its spread in Mississippi by utilizing visual surveys, trap placement, and public education. Both Dr. Spell and Morgan encourage citizens not to move redbay firewood or chips from infested coastal counties.

Laurel wilt is a devastating disease of redbay trees, which are found in the south half of Mississippi. The disease also affects sassafras trees, which are found statewide. Laurel wilt is caused by a fungus transmitted by the non-native redbay ambrosia beetle and can be spread far distances by transporting firewood. This is the first known occurrence of laurel wilt in Mississippi, and the most western known infection to date. Research is currently underway to determine adequate control measures.

Symptoms of a laurel wilt infestation include drooping foliage with a reddish or purplish discoloration. Removal of tree bark reveals a black discoloration in the outer sapwood, and evidence of ambrosia beetle boring can be seen in the tree stem.

Report redbay and sassafras tree deaths in your area to the local office of the Mississippi Forestry Commission. An office directory and additional information concerning forest health issues is available on the Forestry Commission's web site: [www.mfc.state.ms.us](http://www.mfc.state.ms.us). Questions concerning the Forestry Commission's forest health program should be directed to Randy Chapin, Forest Health Coordinator, at (601) 833-6621 or [rchapin@mfc.state.ms.us](mailto:rchapin@mfc.state.ms.us).

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