

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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FDACS CONTINUES ACTIONS TO PROTECT FLORIDA AGAINST SUDDEN OAK DEATH

TALLAHASSEE B In response to the recent discovery of sudden oak death (SOD) on California plants at five Florida garden centers, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (UF/IFAS), and the Southern Plant Diagnostic Network (SPDN) is implementing a public education program to assist with a statewide SOD disease survey effort. SOD is not harmful to humans or animals but is a serious fungal disease that may be deadly to certain oaks and other hardwoods, and also adversely affects other plants including camellias, rhododendrons and viburnums.

Florida nurseries that import products from California were inspected following the announcement on March 12, 2004 that SOD disease was confirmed at Monrovia Growers, Azusa, California; and Specialty Plants, Inc., a direct-mail company out of San Marcos, California. At that time, Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson halted the importation of all nursery stock from California and issued stop sale and hold orders on products from Monrovia Nursery that had already come into Florida. Tracking of the plant material mailed to Florida residents from Specialty Plants, Inc. is currently underway by FDACS.

On March 30, 2004 the Department verified SOD disease on California plants in five Florida garden centers found to be positive for *Phytophthora ramorum*, the fungus that causes SOD. No Florida plants were involved. All positive plants originated from Monrovia Growers in California. This is the first known incidence of this disease brought into Florida for which there is no known cure.

Because SOD presents a real and ongoing threat to the agricultural industry, environment and economy of the State of Florida, the Department continues to restrict the importation of all plants from California, and is prohibiting the entry of plants in the genera referenced in the federal SOD host list and associated host list attached. Movement of nursery stock is a recognized channel for the spread of SOD from established areas to new locations, creating a situation of great concern for the State of Florida.

Florida is recognized as the state with possibly the greatest risk of impact from this disease because of the climate and plant diversity. Therefore, Florida has remained adamant in regulating import restrictions until we can be assured that adequate national quarantine protocols are in place and the risk to Florida's nursery industry and our natural areas has been addressed.

While the state's first level of response to eliminate plants at risk for SOD at the five garden centers is complete, the second level of response is underway and will involve ongoing and extensive public education and outreach programs to identify certain plants purchased in 2003 or 2004 that may have been moved from the garden centers or introduced by other means into the Florida landscape.

The Department, along with the USDA, UF/IFAS and the SPDN is drawing on all resources to prevent the establishment of SOD in Florida. The public can also play a vital role in this effort by serving as extra pairs of eyes to be on the look out for SOD symptoms in their yards or other natural areas of the state.

County Extension Offices have been called upon to assist the Department with a statewide survey to identify any plants potentially infected with SOD that may have left retail garden centers before the stop sale order was put in effect, and to provide the public with a resource for SOD education and a place to bring samples of plants that have SOD symptoms. Extension agents and master gardeners trained to identify SOD symptoms will conduct initial evaluations of plant material, and if deemed appropriate, will forward suspicious samples for laboratory analysis.

The first stage of the survey will target the most likely plant hosts including the genera of camellia, rhododendron and viburnum. Samples that closely match the SOD symptoms will be sent to the Department's Division of Plant Industry in Gainesville for analysis.

This cooperative survey is part of a national effort to quickly discover where *P. ramorum* may be located. All participants, including homeowners, nursery and garden center owners, Extension Agents and master gardeners, are contributing a great service to the state of Florida through the diligent effort to keep SOD from becoming established in our Florida landscapes and natural environment.

Anyone who purchased a plant in the genera of camellia, rhododendron, or viburnum in 2003 or 2004 originating from Monrovia Nurseries in California (distinctive green plastic pot with white lettering) or other California nurseries, or plants that are showing symptoms of SOD as identified on the Web sites listed below, please contact your local County Extension office (contact information available on UF/IFAS Web site at <http://www.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/>) for further instructions. If you are not sure of the origin of the camellia, rhododendron or viburnum plants you purchased in 2003 or 2004, please feel free to contact the Department's helpline and we will assist you in determining if the plants in question are at risk. Your cooperation in the important matter is greatly appreciated.

For more information on SOD, visit the following Web sites
www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi http://spdn.ifas.ufl.edu/Pest_alert.html or call the Department's
toll-free helpline number 888-397-1517.