

Boxwood Blight FAQs for Nursery & Landscape Industry

This Boxwood Blight FAQ fact sheet was compiled in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Agriculture. Additional questions and answers may be added to this fact sheet as we continue to address this issue in Illinois and more information becomes available.

How will Boxwood Blight get to my facility?

Boxwood Blight does not readily travel in the environment on its own, so it will most likely be introduced to a facility or location via infected plant material or unsanitized equipment (cross-contamination) which was used to maintain, prune, install, or transport infected material(s) elsewhere.

Can Boxwood Blight infect any plants other than Boxwoods?

Fortunately Boxwood Blight has a relatively narrow host range, but it can infect Boxwoods and members of the Buxaceae family including Pachysandra and Sacrococca.

What do I do if I suspect I have Boxwood Blight?

The first step you should take is to contact your Illinois Department of Agriculture inspector. He or she will thoroughly work with you on the process. You will most likely need to collect and submit samples to the U of I Plant Clinic for official diagnosis before any further action would be taken.

Once a grower, dealer or landscaper has been found to have boxwood blight, what protocols or compliance methods will be implemented to “release” or clear a nursery/grower from having that dreaded “boxwood blight” tag or label on them?

Once a positive confirmation is returned, needless to say it will be in the facility's best interest to get things cleared up. The Department will send a formal letter informing the facility it is confirmed positive, which will include a timeframe and method(s) to remediate the problem, however, the facility will likely initiate the process themselves. Once confirmed and suspected plants have been destroyed, the company has entered into a Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program compliance agreement, meets the requirements of the compliance agreement, and has passed a visual inspection by an IDOA official, the facility will be deemed "apparently free" of Boxwood Blight and be able to ship in accordance with the national protocol. It's not certain the tag or label will ever be cleared so to speak, but it is generally accepted by state regulators that the product is safe and clean of pests if it meets the compliance requirements.

What is the Boxwood Blight Cleanliness program?

The Boxwood Blight Cleanliness program is a systems approach to prevent the spread of Boxwood Blight via nursery stock. It was developed by the National Plant Board and nursery industry to create a unified method to minimize spread through utilization of monitoring, best management practices, inspections, and education and training.

Will the Department of Agriculture issue separate paperwork specifically showing boxwood blight compliance, showing that the nursery, dealer or landscaper has been cleared or that they have complied? Apparently, other states (like Ohio, for example) issue a certificate indicating a nursery has been inspected and has been found to be free of boxwood blight.

Provided the facility enters into a Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program compliance agreement AND meets the requirements in that CA, which will have an IDOA signature on it, that CA will serve as the necessary paperwork to allow movement of the material. To date, Pennsylvania is the only state requiring that CA for this material to enter the state. Once confirmed, it will be impossible to declare a facility or location "free" of Boxwood Blight as it is nearly impossible and not cost effective to get a comprehensive diagnosis of every plant, square foot of soil, and piece of equipment, and the fact that the pathogen can be present without showing symptoms in the plant material. However, the premise behind the compliance agreement is to certify the facility "apparently free" based on visual inspections, perhaps some testing of suspect or symptomatic plants, destruction of known and suspect plants, appropriate best management strategy, and good cultural practices, whether they have been confirmed or not.

How do I become a Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program compliance agreement holder?

Ask your nursery inspector for a copy. He or she will have compliance agreements available for your review or completion. If you can meet the requirements set forth, and enter into an agreement, you will be considered and recognized as compliant.

Will that compliance eventually be imprinted on a grower, dealer or landscaper's annual Nursery Certificate, similar to the Japanese Beetle endorsement?

This is something we could keep in mind, and eventually implement. If it's easier for industry to have their Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program CA # on their nursery or dealer certificate versus including the actual CA with every shipment, we can certainly look into this as an option if industry prefers.

If a nursery is identified and subsequently "published" as having boxwood blight (i.e. in newspapers, official emails, etc.), will the Department of Agriculture publicly release or promote anything stating that a nursery/grower is now in compliance and allegedly blight free? The Department will not release this sort of info at an individual level. However, we could post information on our website referencing this. With EAB, and with Gypsy Moth, we post compliance agreement holders, so it is possible to post Boxwood Blight Cleanliness Program compliance agreement holders on our Boxwood Blight link. It would allow people to easily access those facilities that are actively managing for Boxwood Blight, providing an added layer of security in sourcing material and adding credibility to those holding one. Additionally, work is being done on a national database of CA holders to make available through the Plant Board websites. This will allow other states, and industry, to check compliance for entities in other states.

