

Box blight: *Volutella buxi* and *Cylindrocladium buxicola*.

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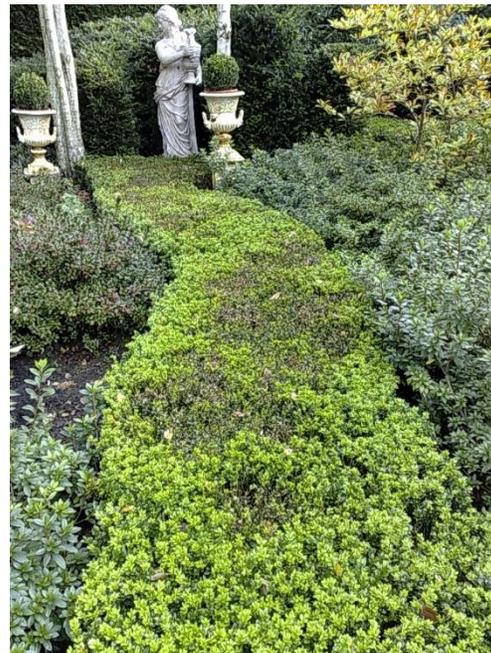
Identification, Biology & Management

Box blights are caused by two fungal diseases known as *Volutella buxi* and *Cylindrocladium buxicola*. In combination these two fungal diseases form the most conspicuous problem to affect box (*Buxus sempervirens*) and its cultivars within the UK and Ireland. Both fungi can occur individually or in combination on the same plant. *Volutella* has been present within the UK and Ireland for many years. *Volutella buxi* results in browning of the leaves and dieback of branches leaving bare patches in hedges and topiary specimens. The fungi spread in wet humid conditions. Pinkish spores appear on the undersides of leaves and are carried in water splashes to new sites. Fallen leaves carry the fungi over the winter and new spores are produced in the spring. *Volutella buxi* enters the plant through clipping cuts and other forms of damage to the leaves and stems.

Symptoms

The other Box Blight, which is more serious, has been recognised since the mid 1990's. The fungus *Cylindrocladium buxicola* (Figures 1 and 2) produces symptoms similar to *Volutella* with defoliated plants the end result. The leaves develop dark brown spots which enlarge to affect leaf tissue. Patches of greyish fungal growth appear on the underside and spores are soon released to further spread infection. Black streaks appear on the stems. The spores are capable of penetrating the leaf surface so wounding via pruning cuts is not necessary for infection to occur. *Cylindrocladium buxicola* requires moist conditions to thrive, spores die in dry conditions. Live spores have been found in decomposing leaves after almost one year, so any debris should be burnt if possible - never added to a compost heap.

Figure 1-2: Symptoms of box blight caused by *Cylindrocladium buxicola*





Control

All affected branches should be pruned out and burnt along with any fallen material around the base of the plant to remove dormant spores that would re-infect the following years growth.

Check potential purchases before buying to avoid bringing box blight into your garden via diseased material.

Good air circulation will reduce the humidity around the plants so allow adequate spacings between plants.

Avoid overhead watering to keep the foliage as dry as possible.

If blight is suspected any implements used to clip or prune should be disinfected before using on healthy material. Household bleach or methylated spirits are suitable sterilizing agents.

Spray with liquid copper towards the end of the growing season. Spray in September, October and November.

During spring spray with an appropriate fungicide. Spray at two weekly intervals until the problem is under control. Please note, however, research findings show

copper is superior in terms of box blight control compared to synthetic fungicides.

Note, not all brown or dead patches on box are caused by Box Blight. Check for other problems such as dog or cat urine at the base of the plant. Dogs and cats can 'territory mark' the same spot repeatedly, scorching the leaves. If the dead area occurs suddenly and not gradually this could be the reason; box blight tends to develop slowly.



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