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Contributed by Pam Keeton

Watching for Tree Diseases

The spring weather was crazy this year – extended cold and rain, interspersed with a warm day here and there. It was, in some ways, the perfect storm for a few plant diseases.

We noticed one of our five-year-old magnolias was losing leaves at an alarming rate and my initial research indicated it might be a fungus. But one day I noticed long cracks on the trunk surrounded by dark, wet patches. I sent photos to Mikaela Boley at the County Extension Office and the verdict was canker disease. The disease was most likely allowed to enter the trunk through the cracks, and those were most likely caused by the temperature fluctuations – especially the frost we had late in April.

This can happen to just about any tree. When the temperatures warm for several days in a row, the sap begins to flow; but if a frost suddenly hits, the sap can freeze and cause the bark to split. This opens the tree up to the introduction of disease, especially during wet weather.

Infected branches can be pruned to save the tree, but when this happens on the main trunk it is often lethal. As far as we know, there is no treatment for cankers caused by splitting bark and we are waiting to see what happens to this tree. It's another lesson in gardening, albeit a difficult one. No one wants to lose a tree.

Magnolia trees are common on the Eastern Shore. Check out the Home and Garden Information Center or County Extension Office for information on pests and diseases.

Find out more about common tree diseases in Maryland at:
<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/tree-diseases>



Cankers on a magnolia trunk.