

Redtip photinia issues could make you see red

Redtip photinia (*Photinia x fraseri*) can be a showstopper in early spring with its bright red new growth, followed by clusters of white flowers. As a result, it's very tempting to want to create a hedge of these fast growing and commonly available evergreen shrubs. Many homeowners have done so – too many actually – and that's part of the problem. The ubiquitous redtip photinia hedges have allowed a fungal disease known as Entomosporium leafspot to proliferate. Once the disease has taken hold, it is difficult and time consuming to eradicate. You will lose the shrubs in your hedge one by one and there is perhaps nothing sadder or more frustrating in your landscape than a once beautiful evergreen privacy fence slowly dying and leaving gaps for everyone to see and see through!



This photinia privacy hedge is dying a slow death from Entomosporium leafspot disease. (Photo credit: Michele Rawleigh)

Redtip photinias are native to Asia, hardy to Zone 7, and prefer full sun or some shade. The shrubs can grow quite large, 10-12 ft tall by 8-10 ft wide. They can be sheared easily to create the dense growth that many homeowners want for privacy. However, maintaining these types of intensive, monoculture plantings can exacerbate Entomosporium leafspot when shrubs are planted close together and trimmed frequently to keep them in bounds.

Entomosporium Leafspot Symptoms

The symptoms of Entomosporium leafspot infection are most prevalent during cooler, moist conditions. It typically starts as tiny red spots on newly emerging leaves, usually at the bottom of the plant first. As the disease progresses, the discolored spots grow and merge into large purple splotches. A gray center appears at maturity and may contain black spots, the fruiting bodies containing the fungal spores that cause reinfections. The leaves die and fall off but still harbor the spores that are spread by wind and splashing water from rain or irrigation. Repeated leaf loss disfigures and weakens the plant and eventually kills it without treatment.

Controlling Entomosporium Leafspot

It's probably easier to prevent Entomosporium leafspot than it is to treat it. The disease is most active during spring and fall. The spores overwinter in leaf litter or on late season new growth stimulated by trimming. Here are some tips to help minimize an outbreak of this fungal disease:

- Note the mature size of the shrub and allow enough space for good air circulation.
- Plant in full sun since shade allows excess moisture to be retained.
- Avoid watering the foliage directly and don't water at night.
- Consider mixed hedge plantings rather than all of one species.

If symptoms of the disease appear:

- Remove and destroy infected leaves and stems. Remove the entire plant for recurring, serious infections.
- Prune when dormant in winter and avoid repeated trimmings that promote new growth.
- Apply new mulch in late winter to cover potential over-wintering spores.
- Use a fungicide labeled for Entomosporium leafspot beginning in late winter through spring and then again in the fall. Follow the product's instructions but note that treatments may need to be as frequent as every week or two to gain the upper hand.

Alternatives to Redtip Photinia

Fortunately, there are several Texas native plants that are suitable substitutes for redtip photinia in the Denton County area. Using natives helps increase your landscape's success because they are adapted to our soils and climate and are supportive of our native insects and critters. The Native Plants of North America database has additional information about each of these shrubs (see the Reference section):

- Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*)
- Southern Wax Myrtle (*Morella cerifera*)
- Carolina Laurel Cherry (*Prunus caroliniana*)
- Evergreen Sumac (*Rhus virens*)
- Inkberry (*Ilex glabra*)
- Blackhaw Viburnum (*Viburnum prunifolium*)
- Agarita (*Mahonia trifoliolata*)

References and More Information

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension

<https://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/library/landscaping/entomosporium-leafspot-of-photinia-and-indian-hawthorn/>

Clemson University – Clemson Cooperative Extension, Home & Garden Information Center

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/photinia-red-tip/>

University of Arkansas – Division of Agriculture, Research & Extension

<https://www.uaex.edu/publications/pdf/FSA-6112.pdf>

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center - Native Plants of North America database

<https://www.wildflower.org/plants-main>



This photinia hedge is struggling: plants are too close together and need frequent trimming to be kept at a quarter(!) of their mature size to fit in this narrow space. (Photo credit: Michele Rawleigh)



Entomosporium leaf spot on photinia
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