

7 April 2020

Dear Extension Agents and Staff Who Use the VT Plant Disease Clinic,

In an effort to comply with Virginia's Temporary Stay at Home Order Due to the Novel Coronavirus, while recognizing the essential functions of the Plant Disease Clinic, we are instituting a new sample submission policy that is effective immediately. The Plant Disease Clinic will continue to provide diagnostic services to Virginia clientele via the Extension offices; however, we are modifying our policy for receiving plant samples, as outlined in this email.

Commercial Clients: Samples from commercial growers must first be submitted as digital images. If the problem cannot be diagnosed from the images, we will arrange to accept a physical sample sent to the Plant Clinic. *(Please be advised that mail delivery to our lab is currently limited to 2 days per week and UPS/FedEx mail is being routed through the VT mail service, so is delayed.)*

Non-Commercial Clients: All samples from non-commercial growers (e.g. samples from landscapes, home gardens, etc.) **must be submitted as digital images**. Physical samples from non-commercial clients will not be accepted at this time.

Landscape Professionals / Arborists: As for non-commercial clients, samples must be submitted as digital images; physical samples are not being accepted at this time.

How to Submit Digital Images:

1. All digital images of plant problems for disease diagnosis should be submitted through the local county Extension agent or other designated Extension office personnel to the Plant Clinic at the following email address: clinic@vt.edu.
2. Images from clients should be screened by Extension personnel (e.g. eliminate poorly focused images, etc.) before sending to the Plant Clinic. Request better images from your client if necessary. Three to four well-focused images that show the pattern of the problem in the location, the overall symptoms on the whole plant and a close-up image of the symptoms are recommended.
3. The client or Extension agent must fill out the Plant Clinic diagnostic form (<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/450/450-097/450-097.html>) as completely as possible. **A PDF or image of the completed diagnostic form must accompany each set of digital images.**
4. The Extension agent or designated Extension personnel should send digital submissions to clinic@vt.edu. **Commercial clients may be cc'd to the submission to expedite the process, but please do not cc: non-commercial clientele to the digital submission.**
5. If the digital submission is from a commercial client, we will quickly follow up with the agent and the client if we need to request a physical sample.
6. Diagnostic reports will be routed to the submitting Extension agent.

Tips for Taking Appropriate Images for Disease Diagnosis:

Although digital diagnosis is more difficult for disease samples than for insect or weed identification, we can often provide at least a preliminary diagnosis if we receive images of good quality. Smartphones generally take good images if you follow a few guidelines.

1. Please submit **only** digital images that are clear and in focus.
2. Include three to four well-focused images that show: a) the pattern of the problem in the location (e.g. field, orchard, nursery, landscape, garden), b) the overall symptoms on the whole plant and c) a close-up of the symptoms on an affected plant. (Note that 3 to 4 well-focused, thoughtfully chosen images are better than numerous random images.)
3. Try to avoid strong shadows on the sample; outdoor images taken on a cloudy day are best. When taking pictures indoors, try to illuminate the plant from both sides to eliminate shadows in the photo.
4. Please request new images from clients if the images are not of good quality and therefore not appropriate for diagnosing the problem.

We will continue to respond to all submissions, both digital and physical, with an electronic report that will be routed through the submitting VCE agent/staff. Please know that we are doing our best to maintain diagnostic services during this time. We will reappraise our approach as the situation evolves and as we assess this sample submission approach.

Best regards and take care,

Mary Ann and Elizabeth