

‘Host of the month’ is a series of Blogs and PDF’s that highlight a tree host and their associated priority pests and diseases that are best seen and recorded in that month. For February we’re looking at Lawson cypress (*Cupressus lawsoniana*) and *Phytophthora lateralis*.

Lawson cypress is a member of the *Cupressaceae*, the second most species rich family of conifers after the *Pinaceae*, the pine family. Both the scientific and common names commemorate Peter Lawson, the Scottish nurseryman who introduced it to cultivation in the UK in 1854. In its native range in the northwest USA, from the southern coast of Oregon into northern California, it is the source of high value timber which is shipped to Japan for use in shrines and coffins. It has only a very minor role in UK forestry but it has become a very important horticultural species. There are currently almost 600 cultivar names covering a diverse range of forms and foliage colours that are found in parks and gardens across the British Isles. The foliage is scale-like and has a distinctive aroma when crushed, often described as parsley-like. The male cones are brilliant red and is one way the species can be distinguished from similar looking species. When backlit the scale leaves can be seen to contain a spindle-shaped translucent resin gland, a useful ID feature.



Translucent glands in the scale-like leaves of Lawson cypress

Image: Matt Parratt



Brilliant red male cones of Lawson cypress

Image: Matt Parratt

Observatree is a citizen science project led by Forest Research, in collaboration with key organisations

Priority pathogen – *Phytophthora lateralis*

Lawson cypress is the key host for *P. lateralis*, an aggressive fungus-like pathogen thought to originate in Asia that spread to the native range of Lawson cypress in the USA where it has killed trees of all ages and has destroyed entire stands in some habitats. It was first identified in the UK in 2010.

Identification

P. lateralis spreads via spores in soil or water and primarily attacks the roots and leads to lesions, discoloration of foliage, dieback, and eventually tree death. Early symptoms include discoloration, initially yellowing, but quickly progressing to a reddish-tinge and finally a dull bronze as the tree dies. These symptoms are caused by dark coloured lesions below the bark which cut off the supply of water and nutrients to the upper parts of the tree. Symptom progression is rapid and it is extremely rare for an infected Lawson cypress to recover.



The bright orange-tinge foliage of a Lawson cypress in the final stages of infection with *Phytophthora lateralis*.

Image: Crown copyright, Forest Research.

For more information check the Observatree resource pages for [Phytophthora lateralis](#) or the [Host of the Month for February](#). You can also test your knowledge with the [Host of the month Quiz](#).

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Reporting

February is an ideal time to seek out Lawson cypress trees and see if you can identify any signs and symptoms of *Phytophthora lateralis*. This *Phytophthora* is a priority pathogen so please report possible sightings via [TreeAlert](#). Healthy tree data is equally important so please do report those too.

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