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### **Join Cornell Researchers to Help Fight Landscape Pest**

Researchers at Cornell are joining forces this spring with gardeners, youth and other “Citizen Scientists” to learn more about an invasive pest, the viburnum leaf beetle.

A small tree or shrub, viburnums flourish throughout the Northeast. Native species grow in old fields and forests, while imported varieties are versatile landscape plants. Some common viburnums include American cranberry bush, arrowwood, Chinese snowball bush, European cranberry bush, hobblebush, and wayfaringtree.

Viburnum leaf beetles first came to New York from Canada in 1996, causing serious damage to plantings in the Rochester area. Originally from Europe, the pest faces few natural enemies here, and is spreading quickly across central, western and northern New York, as well as the Southern Tier and parts of neighboring states. It could be poised to move into the Hudson Valley, New York metro area and Long Island.

The pest’s eggs hatch in late April or early May and the larvae feed on the shrub’s leaves. “The larvae are voracious eaters, and can completely defoliate the plants,” says Dr. Paul Weston, a woody plant pest specialist in Cornell’s Department of Entomology. “Later in summer the adults can come back and strip the plants bare again.” Repeated defoliation over several years can weaken and kill viburnums, he points out.

Weston is part of a team that’s enlisting the support of “Citizen Scientists” to help track the spread of the pest, determine which viburnums are most resistant to damage, and learn more about the beetle’s lifecycle and feeding habits.

“We’re excited about this project because involves ordinary citizens in gathering valuable information that can help keep this pest from ravaging our landscapes,” says project coordinator Lori Bushway, a Senior Extension Associate in the Department of Horticulture.

Bushway goes on to explain that this project builds on the successes of Citizen Science projects pioneered by Cornell’s Laboratory of Ornithology. The lab is famous for programs such as Project Feeder Watch, where Citizen Scientists report on birds that visit their feeders and ornithologists use the information to study shifting bird populations. “We’re applying many of the same principles to help track this pest,” says Bushway.

At the center of the team’s efforts is a website that provides Citizen Scientists with the information they need to participate in the project (<http://www.hort.cornell.edu/VLB>). Detailed pictures at the site make it easy to identify the beetle and its viburnum hosts. Citizen Scientists can register at the site and use online forms to report sightings and other observations.

“You don’t have to be a horticultural expert to participate,” says Bushway. “Even if you’ve never heard of this pest before, you can learn to identify it at the website. And if you can order a book online, you have the computer skills you need to use the online forms to report your observations.”

“We hope to learn a lot that will help us protect these species,” says Weston. “But just as important, we hope to apply what we learn about this pest to other exotic and invasive pests.” With the growth in global trade and travel, such pests will pose even more problems in the future, he adds. One, the Asian longhorned beetle, is a grave concern now in the metro area and Long Island.

Bushway plans to work with Citizen Scientists on other projects in the future, including having gardeners share information about the best-performing vegetable varieties and having homeowners report which trees thrive under different environmental conditions.

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