

Community News

Sudden Oak Death focus of free workshop

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Montalvo Arts Center is hosting a free workshop April 15 on “Sudden Oak Death Blitz” to inform and educate the community about an exotic disease that is threatening the survival of tanoak and several native oak species in California.

“Sudden Oak Death is an extremely prominent issue all over California, but especially in the Bay Area,” Leah Ammon, the associate director of marketing and communications at Montalvo Arts Center. “It’s a situation that’s been growing all across the Bay Area for years and it continues to grow, facilitated by the crazy rain we’ve been having.”

Sudden Oak Death, or SOD, is an exotic introduced disease that has hit more than one million oak trees along coastal regions of California and Oregon. The pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*, is a microscopic organism that spreads during periods of relatively warm rainy weather, according to the UC Berkeley Forest Pathology and Mycology Lab. Late spring in Northern California is one of the most dangerous times for oaks.

The SOD Blitz workshops get locals involved in detecting the disease, and train them to produce detailed local maps of disease distribution. The map can then be used to identify areas where the infestation may be mild enough to justify proactive management.

Dr. Matteo Garbelotto, an adjunct professor at UC Berkeley’s Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management, spearheaded the issue by creating SOD Blitzes throughout the Bay Area. Montalvo’s SOD Blitz is just one of 20 planned for this spring and summer.

Last year saw the most significant increase in SOD in California since the Blitz program began in 2006. Montalvo Arts Center trees have experienced SOD firsthand. The center has hosted SOD Blitzes twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall, every year for six years.

“Montalvo became involved in SOD education outreach in 2009 through the initiative of a Sally and Don Lucas Artist Fellow named Mierle Ukeles,” Ammon said. “Ukeles, who learned about how pervasive the infestation of SOD was in the forest areas of Montalvo’s grounds, was commissioned by Montalvo to develop a project called O OAKS OH!”

Ukeles’ project began to address the health of Montalvo’s land and focused on the sudden death of its local ancient oak trees. The SOD Blitzes are more focused on scientific education and the mapping project, in line with Garbelotto’s vision for that program.

Montalvo gardener Ann Northrup will lead this Saturday’s training, which starts at 10 a.m. Free on-site parking is available. For more information, call the box office at 408.961.5858 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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