

## **A vegetarian solution for verticillium wilt**

It happens all too often that one just has to have a special plant for a specific area in the yard or garden, but once the plant is in place, despite one's best efforts, it simply doesn't thrive, or it just dies. I always wanted a smokebush to set off the corner of my back shrub border and was delighted when I received a small seedling in the mail. The first year, the smokebush did just fine, putting out lots of healthy new stems. But the following June, I arrived home (after a garden tour) to find it completely wilted. Naturally, I first assumed that it was simply in dire need of watering, but when it remained wilted by the following morning, I knew that I had a much more serious issue to deal with.

Getting onto the Internet, I discovered that the most likely problem afflicting the plant was verticillium wilt, and when I called plant pathologist Brian Hudelson, he confirmed that was indeed the likely issue I was facing. Verticillium wilt is caused by a specific fungus—*Verticillium dahliae*—that grows in the vascular system of the afflicted plant, preventing adequate water uptake. Brian told me that I might as well resign myself to losing my smokebush and suggested that I put in something else that would be resistant to the fungus.

But I really wanted to save that smokebush!

So after a bit more sleuthing on the Internet, I discovered an agricultural research article that purported low incidence of verticillium wilt in fields previously planted with broccoli (<http://www.apsnet.org/phyto/search/2000/0126-04r.asp>). With nothing to lose, I went to the store and bought a head of broccoli, which I chopped up and incorporated into the soil all around the smokebush, digging the broccoli bits into the soil and then watering. I did this every week for about a month and could see that the smokebush was miraculously recovering.

It is now four years later and I have a huge thriving smokebush—just what I wanted. I can't promise that this "cure" will work for you, but it's simple, inexpensive and safe, unlike most commercial fungicides.

So if you are ever plagued with verticillium wilt, at least give it a try!

—Margaret Welke