

# **Spread the Word, Not the Disease! Sudden Oak Death Outreach and the UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County SOD Specialists<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Sonoma County has more sudden oak death (SOD) than any other county in California and the disease is still spreading. At least 163,000 acres of Sonoma County's forests are affected by SOD based on USDA Forest Service aerial surveys, and tanoak (*Notholithocarpus densiflorus*) deaths attributed to the disease in the Northern California Shared Service Area increased almost eight-fold between 2016-2017. SOD Blitz data showed a nine-fold increase in estimated true infection rate of trees in some areas of Sonoma County from 2015-2017 and new outbreaks continued to appear in 2018.

Thanks to funding from the USDA Forest Service, the Sudden Oak Death Outreach Program of Sonoma County provides practical, evidence-based information to a diverse audience. The goal of the program is to understand the impact of SOD in Sonoma County, promote forest health to preserve wildlife habitat and save high value trees, and to prevent spread into disease-free areas via community education and citizen science research. Many homeowners, tree care professionals, and land managers rely upon University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) Sonoma's SOD Outreach Program for up-to-date information about disease biology, diagnosis, spread, and management options.

Master Gardener SOD Specialists are volunteer educators who receive specialized training in SOD in order to work with homeowners, community groups, college students, and public parks users. They do so through various educational events such as library presentations, displays at farmers' markets and community festivals, an information desk staffed 35 hours/week, and leading six SOD Blitz events throughout the county each year. The program coordinator, Kerry Wininger, works with landowners, tree-care professionals, tribal groups, educators, and natural resource managers on disease detection and management through site visits, phone and email, and educational meetings. She also provides Master Gardener trainings, supervises interns, and creates visibility in the press, media, and online. The Program Advisor, Steven Swain, supplies expertise in adult education, helps develop workshops, and gives scientific direction to the overall program.

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By empowering knowledgeable and passionate volunteers to interact with the public, the Sudden Oak Death Outreach Program of Sonoma County helps spread the word about SOD to the wider community at a very low cost, helping to mitigate the many impacts of this disease.