

France reports first case of fatal olive tree bacteria

September 6 2019



French olive trees, similar to this one pictured in Italy, have been infected with a disease called *Xylella fastidiosa*, a bacteria carried from tree to tree by a little bug

France's agriculture ministry said Friday that it had detected its first

cases of a bacterium that has been devastating olive trees in Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean basin.

Two decorative olive trees in southern France, one in Antibes and the other in Menton, were found to be infected with *Xylella fastidiosa*.

Although the disease has been found on other plants in southern France and on the island of Corsica starting in 2015, it was the first time olive trees had been impacted by a threat that has no known cure, the ministry said.

It said the two trees would be destroyed in the coming days, and all other [plants](#) particularly vulnerable to the bacterium within a five-kilometre (three-mile) radius will be pulled up as well to try to prevent the bacterium's spread.

They were struck by the same "pauca" subspecies of *Xylella fastidiosa* that has devastated millions of euros' worth of ancient [olive trees](#) across Italy, the ministry added.

Xylella, which can be transmitted by insects or vehicles, quickly withers trees by blocking their ability to absorb water.

The only way to fight the spread of the disease, known as "olive tree leprosy", is to destroy diseased trees.

The European Commission describes *Xylella* as "one of the most dangerous plant bacteria worldwide, causing a variety of diseases, with huge economic impact for agriculture, public gardens and the environment."

Scientists say there is a real risk the disease will spread to the entire Mediterranean basin, where olive oil is a staple in the diet and vital to the

economy.

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