

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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Borers can be a problem on Ash Trees

Borers are a group of insects whose immature stages generally develop within the host plant. Insects that feed on foliage of plants generally pose a minimal threat to plant health since auxiliary buds can produce new foliage. Borers, on the other hand, feed unseen beneath the bark and destroy irreplaceable cambial and wood tissue. Many borers are fairly insignificant, but there are a few that may cause major problems for trees and shrubs. Remember that not all holes in trees are created by borers though. A common problem on pine trees is sapsucker damage that occurs as woodpeckers peck holes into the trunk of the tree to find food.

A common Kansas borer that I receive questions about is the ash/lilac borer. As the name suggests, this insect favors ash trees and lilac and privet shrubs. The insect larvae bores into the trunk or stems of these plants to complete its life-cycle. The damage causes the base of infested lilac stems to swell and the bark to separate from the wood. Usually a fine sawdust-like material is present around the holes in the stems as well. Ash trees are affected by the borer on the trunk of the tree. The bark will usually swell and crack if there are several repeated infestations.

Ash/lilac borers overwinter as larvae in infested trees and shrubs. Moths generally begin to emerge in mid to late April. Emergence peaks in May, dwindles by mid to late June and ends by the first week of July. The moth has clear wings and resembles a wasp. There is one generation per year.

Control for ash/lilac borer usually consists of a two pronged approach. First, trees need to be kept healthy. When the tree is under stress it is more likely to be attacked by borers and other pests. Watering ash trees during hot weather can help reduce the stress these trees receive. Applying an insecticide to the trunk and stems of plants that are susceptible may also be necessary to prevent damage until the tree becomes more healthy. The first spray should be applied around May 1st this year. A second spray will also be needed four weeks later. Products containing bifenthrin or permethrin such as Hi-Yield 38 Plus Turf, Termite and Ornamental Insect Control are available for homeowners to use. Make sure the label lists borers before buying the product. On ash trees, thoroughly treat the trunk and larger limbs. If the tree is heavily damaged it should be cut down and the debris should be burned. On lilac and privet the infested stems/canes should be removed from the plant.

While the ash/lilac borer is quite common in Kansas, there is another borer called the emerald ash borer that hasn't arrived in our state, but is destroying ash trees in several other states. The emerald ash borer is the larvae of an exotic beetle from Asia that has been discovered in the U.S. Currently the beetle has been found in many states and has even been found as close as Missouri.

The beetles are fairly easy to identify since they have bright metallic emerald green wing covers and a bronze or golden green body. The larva can be over an inch long and feed on the cambium of ash trees. They make S-shaped galleries which progressively become wider. This is a very serious pest on ash trees and quarantines are in place in affected areas to try to slow down the spread of the insect. You should be aware of this pest if you have ash trees on your property.

We currently have no complete way to control the emerald ash borer, although efforts are underway to find treatment methods. Right now it is best to be aware of this problem and monitor your ash trees for possible damage by this insect in the coming months and years.