

established 1938

National Arborist Association

Dedicated to the Advancement of Commercial Tree Care Businesses

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For immediate release

This Spring, Check Your Trees for Boring Insects

Hard to identify and even harder to control, tree boring insects include hundreds of species representing dozens of insect families. A general understanding of the similarities and differences within the group can go a long way toward saving trees in the urban landscape.

Borers include any insect that feeds and grows inside the woody tissues of trees during at least one stage of their life cycle. Some prefer dead trees, and a few will even attack healthy, vigorous specimens, but the vast majority of borers make their homes in trees that are diseased, damaged, or stressed in some way. For this reason, borer infestation is often considered a secondary health problem. Any tree that shows signs of stress (limb dieback or early fall foliage) can be considered at high risk for borer damage.

What can homeowners do to identify boring insects in time to save their trees? Homeowners should look for:

Frass: Frass is insect excrement, and often appears as dry, grainy material near insect feeding sites. Frass can accumulate around borer holes, and may even collect in piles at the base of heavily infested trees. The presence of frass mixed with the sawdust created by feeding is a sure sign of borer damage.

Crown Die-back: One of the most obvious and common signs of borer damage is the gradual dieback of twigs and branches in the crown. Borer activity in the phloem and xylem can interfere with the flow of nutrients and water between the leaves and the roots, causing branches and twigs to die, resulting in either general dieback or flagging.

Exit Holes: Carefully examining trees for exit holes, which can be made by either fully formed adults or mature larvae that leave the host tree to pupate.

Wet Spots: A tree's first defense against a borer pest is often to produce sap, which is intended to smother or drive out the invading insect. This reaction may result in wet spots on the bark of the tree. Examine these wet patches carefully for other signs of borer damage, such as holes, frass, or sawdust.

Growth Irregularities: Trees often respond to borer feeding by forming tough callus tissue around the wound, which may appear as irregular ridges or bumps below the bark. Borers that feed on shoots and twigs may cause unusual hooks or forks to form on the affected stem. Large swellings and the loss of bark can indicate severe borer damage as well.

Breakage: Extensive borer damage can lead to breakage in twigs, branches, and even trunks. Severe borer damage often goes unnoticed until a wind storm snaps the trunk of a tree that has been riddled with borer holes.

Egg Deposition Sites: While the eggs are usually too small to see, some boring insects chew pits or grooves in the bark that can be found upon close inspection.

Adults or Pupae: In some cases adult insects can be found near the host tree. Those species that pupate outside the tree may create cocoons or pupae in bark crevasses or debris around the tree.

The most effective form of borer control is prevention. By monitoring high-risk trees and applying the appropriate pesticides to eggs and newly hatched larvae, a tree care professional can reduce the risk of severe borer damage. The best preventative treatment, however, is fertilization, watering, soil aeration, mulching, and other treatments aimed at increasing tree health. Healthy trees are less likely to be selected as borer hosts and better able to defend themselves from borer attack.

Homeowners who are looking for someone to assess their landscape and make recommendations should consult a professional arborist. Contact the National Arborist Association (NAA), a 65-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. It has more than 2,800 members who recognize stringent safety and performance standards, and are required to carry liability insurance. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the "Locate Your Local NAA Member Companies" program. You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a zip code search on their Web site, www.natlarb.com.

If you would like additional information, please contact Garvin@natlarb.com