

Borers: A Secondary Pest

Occasionally I get a call from a client with questions about the holes they found on the trunk and/or branches of their declining tree. Most times, the cause of these holes are borers. Now seeing the tree declining at the same time as these holes show up often leads many people to believe that the borers are the cause of the decline but that isn't the case. Borers are considered a secondary pest and are often attracted to weakened and stressed hosts. In Kansas, the primary stress factor is drought, especially when coupled with extremely hot weather. Other factors that might also contribute to this moisture stress are damaged root systems or heavy compaction of the soil. In fact, when adequate moisture is available, small borer larvae do not survive the water surging through the tree's vascular elements.

Borers most commonly come from either moths or beetles. Only a few species of moths commonly produce borers in Kansas and these are the Clearwing Moth, Carpenterworm moth and Leopard Moth. Beetles produce many more types of borers. Flatheaded borers, Roundheaded borers and Shothole borers all come from the larvae of different beetles.

I feel that I need to mention that the most infamous borer now is the Emerald Ash Borer. This borer has received a lot of press in many parts of the country for the damage that it has caused. Fortunately for us, there has been no reports of the Emerald Ash Borer anywhere close to us. It has been confirmed in 12 counties in northeastern Kansas, it has been confirmed in Buffalo County (Kearney), Nebraska and in several counties along I-25 in Colorado. Right now, there this borer isn't a concern in our area but please remember practice some common prevention tips so it stays that way. Including not bringing home trees or even firewood from areas that have confirmed problems.

The best way to prevent borers from damaging your trees is to help the tree maintain its health and vigor all year long. Select proper tree varieties for your area and consider buying locally produced trees that are adapted to the local pests and climate. Prepare sites to give transplanted trees the best chance of thriving and give constant attention and care to the new transplants. Prune, remove and dispose of dead, sick or fallen branches and limbs. Consider using tree wraps around the trunks of newly planted trees as an added layer of protection. And maintain a good watch to make sure that borer activities haven't started and use insecticides if need be on infested trees.

Now if you do end up with an infestation and need to make use of insecticides to get rid of a borer problem, you need to identify which borer is causing the problems so the proper chemicals can be used. The insecticides used to treat trees for borers are usually applied either through trunk injections or through soil injections or drenches and are usually best done by a commercial applicator who has experience dealing with tree pests.

In conclusion, the best way to control borers is to take care of your trees and woody plants so that they are not an inviting target for borers to infest. As always, if you have any questions about this topic or anything else, please feel free to contact the Rawlins County Extension Office.