

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Battling the BagWorms”

Late spring and early summer is the time of year homeowners should begin to scout their conifers and deciduous trees for bagworms and plan accordingly for treatment. Once bagworms are spotted, tree owners should plan to treat weekly for 4 to 5 weeks.

In addition to hatches that are occurring on your own trees, bagworms can “blow in” from neighboring plants as well. Which increases the need to treat multiple times in a season.

Once the larvae emerge, they begin feeding on the host tree or shrub as they work to build the encasing bag from which they take their name. The plant debris bag provides protection for the bagworms and makes chemical treatment less effective.

K-State horticulture specialist say chemical control of bagworms can be effective in preventing tree damage, but it is important to remember that the insects play a role in the local ecosystem. They provide a food source for many birds. Infestations are often cyclical, giving damaged trees the time they need to recover, so chemical treatment may not be required for many trees. But treating high-value conifers such as windbreaks, tree farms, or ornamental landscape trees are important.

Horticulture specialist state that adequate coverage is especially important when treating for bagworms including the penetration of the interior canopy and upper branches. Commercial treatment may be more effective for larger trees or established windbreaks where household sprayers do not have enough pressure to reach.

Many insecticides are labeled to control bagworms, but timing and coverage must be carefully planned to ensure effectiveness. When caterpillars are small, the organic selective insecticides Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*, subspecies *kurstaki*) or spinosad can be effective. These insecticides do not impact beneficial insects like broad-spectrum options, which sometimes lead to resurgent populations of spider mites that further damage treated trees.

However, if the early window for treatment is missed, broad-spectrum insecticides containing malathion, carbaryl, acephate, or cyfluthrin may be better options. Hand picking and destroying bag worms once they construct their protective bags is also a great option for smaller infestations

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at lindsayshorter@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.