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Insect Pests of Oaks

by Stanley Rachesky
Entomologist, University of Illinois

We live in an area of the country where Oak trees grow tall and are an important part of our landscape. However, insects also must live and the oak tree affords the insect a place to feed. Following is discussed some of the insect problems your oak trees may be battling this summer.

Borers will weaken oak trees as they will other species of trees. Helping a borer attack are conditions of transplanting shock, dry weather, poor environment, etc. The carpenter worm and the flat-headed apple tree borer are frequent visitors in the wood of this tree. Last year, before restrictions were imposed on DDT, recommending a chemical for borer control was simple. This year I could only guess at using possibly Cygon (dimethoate) in early May for the flat-headed apple borer and in June for the carpenter worm.

Oak kermes is of special importance on bur oak but is occasionally found on other species. This insect is closely related to scale problems. It overwinters on the bark of twigs but quickly migrates to a growing new shoot. They distort and kill new growth. For control before the buds swell to kill the adults apply an oil spray while the plant is dormant; to kill the crawlers apply malathion about the first weeks of July.

Leaf miners can be the larvae of small beetles, twig moths, flies or sawflies. They feed between the upper and lower surfaces of the leaves of oaks and a great variety of other shade trees where they produce blisters and blotches on the leaves. For control use either malathion or diazinon. The foliage should be sprayed thoroughly when miners are first appearing. This treatment should be repeated in 10-12 days.

Galls always seem to cause alarm to people concerned for the welfare of trees. The galls appear in many shapes and sizes and are no cause for alarm. The gouty oak gall, the wool-sower gall and the oak apple gall are the most prevalent seen. Damage to oaks by galls is rarely serious enough to even consider spraying. Galls provide insect protection and you must know the life cycle of the particular species of gall to gain control. Sprays are applied when the insects or mites that cause the gall are in crawling stage and left unprotected on the trees. Either diazinon or malathion would then be applied.

Check your area for exact timing of sprays. From north to south Illinois timing must differ by 3-4 weeks.

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