

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

University of Illinois

WILL BIRCH TREES GO THE WAY OF THE ELM?

Birch trees are some of the most beautiful plants available for gardeners in Chicagoland.

Sadly, these magnificent plants are threatened by an insect pest which can kill the tree outright. This pest is the bronze birch borer. In some localities nearly all white or paper birches even large old trees, have been destroyed by this pest.

Infestation is first noticed when tips of upper branches turn brown. Large branches progressively die back, until the entire tree succumbs. Infested branches often appear swollen and brown, with ridges around smaller ones.

An examination of the inner bark of infested branches reveals numerous burrows, each four to five feet long, crossing and recrossing, completely cutting off circulation of sap. The burrows are tightly packed with sawdust and each contains a slender white grub about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long.

The larvae pupate in spring and emerge in June as greenish bronze beetles which cut their way out of the branches, leaving small, slightly oval holes.

Females deposit eggs in cracks in the bark. Hatching takes place in about ten days and the tiny borers work their way into the tree to repeat the cycle, further injuring the tree.

Control of this pest is difficult. Hatching larvae are the only stage exposed to chemical control. The recommended material is Cygon (dimethoate). It should be applied to trunk and branches the first of June so that the larvae encounter it as they try to burrow into the tree.

Trees should be fertilized and watered to maintain active growth. Some overwintering larvae can be destroyed by pruning out and burning dead branches in early spring.

The most promising control appears to be a small, parasitic wasp which is capable of boring through the bark with its ovipositor to lay an egg on the borer larva. Research is now in progress to find ways of rearing and establishing this beneficial predator.

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