

Pernicious Plague

A FOREIGN VISITOR SPREADS LIKE A WILDFIRE
THROUGH CALIFORNIA'S EUCALYPTUS TREES

By Frank H. Andorka Jr.

The Australian Redgum Lerp Psyllid has descended upon California, and its destruction has been felt on golf courses across the state.

Scientists aren't sure how it arrived in the United States — it certainly didn't book an airline ticket — but the pest that defoliates Redgum eucalyptus trees and renders them open to other diseases has certainly wreaked havoc in only a year.

"It has spread quickly," said Dr. Lester C. Young, an entomologist for California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, Calif. "I can't say how quickly it's going to spread across the United States, but

where there are eucalyptus trees, there's a chance this bug will attack them."

"All you can do is sit back and watch it happen," said Kent Davidson, superintendent of Industry Hills GC in Industry Hills, Calif. "There's nothing we can do. I feel very helpless."



The nasty Redgum Lerp Psyllid

Davidson said there are hundreds of thousands of eucalyptus trees on the 300-acre property that was built in 1978. If the Redgum Lerp Psyllid destroys the trees, he'll have to replant with different species.

"As the weather cools, the lerp seems to be slowing down some," Davidson said. "We're hoping that as it slows down, a natural predator might come along to help us out."

At press time, the Redgum Lerp Psyllid, which first destroyed the Redgum eucalyptus trees, has now spread to at least six other species, all related to the Redgum, Young said. When the Lerp Psyllid sucks the sap out of the eucalyptus leaves, the leaves fall off, depriving the trees of nourishment and weakening their immune systems.

Young said he has conducted some experiments with a new pesticide called Imicide from J.J. Mauget Co. in Arcadia, Calif. The pesticide is micro-injected into the base of the tree and moves through the tree's vascular system to the leaves. When the Redgum Lerp Psyllid drinks the sap out of the leaves, it takes a swig of pesticide with it, and eventually dies. Young said the micro-injection system can last for four months.

Other tips for those battling these bugs:

- Minimize stress to infected trees.
- Provide supplemental water to trees during summer or droughts.
- Be careful not to irrigate too close to the trunk of the trees.
- Irrigate no more than once per month.
- Avoid fertilizer because the Redgum Lerp Psyllid prefers the young growth stimulated by the application of fast-release fertilizers.

Quotable

"I will always remember that smile and that laugh and that beautiful, graceful swing. It's hard to believe we're not going to watch that effortless swing anymore."

— Ben Crenshaw on the tragic death of Payne Stewart.

"..."

— The reaction of a golf clinic crowd to an insensitive joke by Fuzzy Zoeller (*oh no, not again!*) about JFK Jr. dying in an airplane crash. We hope Zoeller was wearing his spearmint shoes after putting his foot in his mouth — again.

"Running a golf course is a life; it's not a job."

— Alan Puckett, superintendent of Lake Region Yacht & CC in Winter Haven, Fla.

"The image of a player trying to incite the crowd ... if that's what they perceive it to be, I'm not sure it was. I think they were just caught up in the excitement. Every hole of the Ryder Cup is like the final hole of a major championship, and you're the leader."

— Jim Awtrey, CEO of the PGA, responding to complaints by European players that American players were inciting the crowd during the Ryder Cup.

"If you watch a game, it's fun. If you play it, it's recreation. If you work at it, it's golf."

— Bob Hope, from "Webster's Dictionary of Quotable Definitions."