

ask the expert

BY BALAKRISHNA RAO

Oak infestation

A number of oak trees in the San Francisco Bay area are infested with an insect. The caterpillars feed and cause extensive damage. When they're small, they feed on one surface of the leaf. As the larvae become larger, they feed through the leaves and can remove the leaves. We see the adults around May and again around October. What are they, and how do we get rid of them?

— CA

From your description, the problem is most likely related to the California oak-worm (or oak moth), *phryganidia californica*. It's considered to be one of the major insects affecting oaks in your state.

These insects are cyclic, which means in some years they may be very active and in other years their population may not be high. Extensive outbreaks and feeding can cause defoliation, affecting the tree's shade and aesthetic benefits.

In your area, you may get two generations of the insect. It may overwinter as an egg or young larvae. As the temperatures increase in spring, the larvae mature and start feeding as you described. First, they tend to feed on one side. Then, as the larvae mature, they feed through the leaves.

They pupate on leaves, branches or trunks of oaks and/or other trees or objects nearby. Adult moths emerge from May through July and fly at dusk time. Then, they repeat the cycle and produce second generations of adults, which emerge in October or November. These adults produce eggs on leaves, branches and trunks. Deciduous oaks may get less infestations than evergreen oaks in the spring because eggs produced on leaves in late summer or early

fall will be shed along with the leaves, which can be raked or blown away.

To manage the California oak moth, consider treating with insecticides such as bacillus thuringensis (Bt), Sevin, or Orthene. Bt is a biological control bacterial agent. This treatment works better on younger stages of the insect larvae. Also, it may help to rake and dispose of infested leaves.

Hit-and-run

A customer of ours has a young Chinese red maple tree that was run over by a station wagon and stripped of bark from the base of the trunk to the top of the tree. What can be done to save this little five-foot tree?

— CT

Depending upon how much bark has been stripped and damaged, the tree may survive the winter and produce normal growth next spring. Injury resulting from mechanical damage often doesn't become obvious until moisture and heat stress occurs in the summer and the tree shows scorching symptoms and starts to decline.

In the meantime, consider removing all the loose bark by using the bark tracing technique — without harming the uninjured, intact areas. Go around the injured bark with a sharp knife, trying to take only the loose bark. Also, provide proper watering, mulching and fertilizing as needed. Because of the injury, the tree is now stressed and susceptible to pest problems such as borer insects and canker diseases, so provide management as needed.

Dursban alternatives

We're in the process of reviewing our insect control program for landscape pest management. In the past, we've used Dursban for a number of pests on trees and shrubs. Now, because Dursban won't be available and/or we can't use it anymore, we need to find alternative products. What can we use in its place?

— IL

As far as Dursban use, it's my understanding that you can still use it until your supply is depleted if you have the product and label in your inventory. To confirm this, check with your Dow AgroSciences representative or account manager. However, if your clients are aware of Dursban's removal, they may object to using it on their property.

As an alternative, consider using an insecticide such as Merit (imidacloprid), a systemic insecticide from Bayer. You can apply this in fall to get the benefit of systemic action and managing pests the following spring. It should be good for beetles, borers, leafminers and sawflies, Japanese beetles, etc.

Another group of new chemicals is called pyrethroids (Astro, Talstar, Deltagard, Scimitar and Tempo). Read and follow label guidelines for specific rates and specific insect control. Also become familiar with their safety issues. Some of them may have concerns regarding throat, skin or eye irritation. These pyrethroid products are slowly replacing the traditional insecticides of the past for landscape pest management.

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SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO: "Ask the Expert" Landscape Management; 7500 Old Oak Blvd.; Cleveland, OH 44130, or e-mail: rhall@advanstar.com. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear.

