

Bagworms 5/22/18

The topic this week is bagworms. Unlike most caterpillars that are hard to tell apart, bagworms are quite easy to identify. Because as their name implies, the larva live in bags.

Before we can dive into how to control bagworms we must first talk about their life cycle. Bagworm eggs over winter as eggs inside old bags. Sometime around mid-May the larva will hatch and exit the old bags. The larva drop down on a fine strand of silk that will be blown around in the breeze until they come into contact with a limb/branch or foliage. Then they immediately start constructing their own bags using bits and pieces of the foliage around them to help them hide better/ blend in with their surroundings. As the larva continue to grow the bags continue to expand to accommodate them. Once we get in to August they are done feeding, and seal themselves inside of their bags and begin the pupal stage, which generally lasts two or three weeks. After the pupal stage they will begin looking for a mate and reproduce and start the cycle all over again.... By the way a female bagworm can produce 1000 eggs that could hatch next year.

So how damaging can they be?

Good question, the bagworms do mostly foliar damage. The reason that we think of bagworms on cedars and other junipers is because of their slow growth rate. If they could replenish the leaves that were damaged quickly then they would be much better against bagworms. But the truth is, we have seen uncontrolled bagworm populations kill large well established windbreaks in the district.

So now lets talk control!!

There are natural predators for bagworms, just like there are for most insects in KS. But in seasons where we have good moisture and growing conditions the natural predators just can't keep up, so we can see rapid increases of bagworms during these times.

Umm so what else can we do.. well if you are against insecticides you can hand pick the bagworms from your trees or shrubs. If you are going to do this I would recommend you doing it in the winter months as the bags stand out against the darker green foliage of your evergreens. You would want to have them removed by mid-April as a general rule. The problem with this is you need to dig into each bush/tree and find every bag possible.. remember any bag could have 1000's eggs in it. In most cases hand picking is impractical as the trees are to tall, to heavily infested or just to many plants to get all the bags picked off.

So the other option we have is to spray insecticide. Insecticides are the most effective when the larva are in their early developmental stage. How many times you spray are dependent on how much damage you had the year before. If you had light feeding you would only need to spray once, sometime late June or early July. If you had severe damage you should consider spraying the end of May or beginning of June and then again the end of June or beginning of July. The second application is used to pick up those bagworms that hatched later then the first wave.

Not only is timing critical but so is coverage. Merely waving a sprayer nozzle and misting the infected tree will only kill the larva that are eating on the outside part of the tree. You really need a high pressure sprayer that will blow the insecticide all the way into the dense foliage and thoroughly cover the tree.

There is a long list of insecticides that can be used. You can just look at the back of the label of the bottle when you go to buy the product and see if bagworm is listed or you can call the office(785.448.6826) and talk to me about what products to use.

Another tip to remember is that spraying in late July or anytime in August is generally a waste of time and money as the bagworms are generally harder to control do to size and because they are done feedings at this point.

More often than not we can bring the tree back from bagworm damage just by controlling them. That's why if you had severe feeding the year before we require a second application. We want to keep them from damaging the tree at all which will help keep your tree moving forward toward recovery.