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Tree Times

MORGAN TREE SERVICE
THE "VITACARE' COMPANY

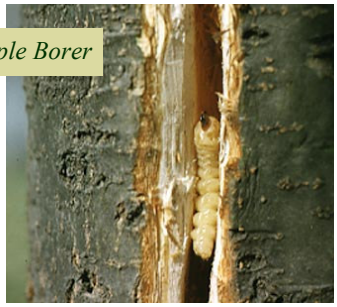
Tree Borers and What To Do About Them

Over the last thirty-two years I have had opportunities to encounter all sorts of tree problems and plant issues in the Memphis and Mid-South area. Naturally, some of these are site specific, such as root damage to large trees close to a new construction site. Others have been species-specific, such as the legitimate concern about Dutch Elm Disease (*Ceratocysystis ulmi*), a fungal wilt disease appearing in native elms.

Yet there is a large third class of plant problems that invariably seems to run across species lines and seems to appear indiscriminately in and on all kinds of sites, new and old alike. Maybe one of the best examples of this sort of problem is the near-universal and recurring issue with woody stem borers. The word itself is interesting. "Borer" is the common name given to a variety of insects that in the adult stage and more frequently in the larval stage, live in, feed on and generally destroy plant tissue, most often in the woody parts of the plant.

Of course, as you might imagine, there are several kinds of borers that each prefer a certain kind of tree or group of trees. But across the board, a very frequent door opening invitation for most of them is low vitality and poor tree health. Just like people, plants that are stressed or weakened by age or preceding circumstances then become the easier natural target for these common wood destroying insects.

Even on older undisturbed sites, unfavorable weather conditions can be a prime precipitator of this problem. Therefore, it is important to keep your established trees adequately watered during dry periods. When there is no rain, a weekly slow application of water for three to four hours will help guard against many problems, including borers.



Apple Borer

In our area, the dogwood borer (*Synanthedon scitula*) is a clearwing borer that infests dogwoods, oaks, birch, elm, hickory, pecan and apple. Another clearwing borer is the maple callus borer

Dogwood Borer

(*Synanthedon acerni*) that can be found primarily in weak red and sugar maples. Both can be largely thwarted with preventative applications of chlorpyrifos (e.g., Dursban and variants).

In addition to the clearwing group, there are flathead borers that include the apple tree borer and the two-lined chestnut borer. Both of these can infest oaks, maples, sycamores, and dogwoods.

A third type that is a pest of oaks is the round headed borer. Both the red oak borer and the white oak borer are in this group. The red oak borer attacks all kinds of oaks.

Sounds serious. So what's to be done? Use that chlorpyrifos as a topical application to runoff in the spring and in the summer over the entire trunk and lower limbs of smaller trees and from ground to eight feet on large trees. The residue of this product will help prevent the onset of this secondary invasive pest. For already entrenched borer presence, Entomopathogenic nematodes can be applied in May thru September to enter the borer tunnels and counter-attack the culprits through natural body openings. A second more radical response that is sometimes possible as combat against an entrenched population is the stem injection of Bidrin into the vascular tissue (cambium) surrounding the damaged site.

But most importantly, don't forget to water your trees with long and slow weekly applications. Someone said once that "a stitch in time saves nine."

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