



Have You Heard?

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BAGWORMS MADE THEIR MARK

There was a lot of damage this year to certain farmstead cedar windbreaks due to bagworms. They overwintered well and hatched. I was reminded of that this week when helping my neighbor pick off one-third of a five-gallon bucket full of bagworms off his ornamental juniper bush in his yard.

Bagworm eggs hatch in late May and early June. With our weather swings this year, after a cold dry spring, we had that first week on hot weather where I think we had an early first hatch and then some hatched later.

Young bagworms are as small as one-eighth inch long and can be difficult to see. After hatching, the larvae emerge from a hole at the base of the bag and spin down a strand of silk. The tiny insect is often caught by the wind and ballooned to nearby plants. Once a host is found, larvae begin to form a new bag around their body from chewing on foliage of the host plant. The larva is a brown or tan caterpillar with black markings. Larvae remain in their protective bag, sticking their head out only to feed. Bagworm larvae feed up until late August usually. This year I predict the majority will slow down sooner than that. The mature larvae then attach their bag to a branch with a strong band of silk and begin to pupate.

In talking with an area commercial applicator who does an excellent job with ground application equipment in windbreaks, I asked him if he could control bagworms one inch in length. He indicated if they are wiggling and feeding you can, with the right insecticide, such as bifenthrin (talstar, capture or brigade). Once they quit feeding you are wasting your money when treating trees.

Adult males usually emerge in September. They are small, furry gray moths with clear wings. The adult female does not have wings and never leaves the bag. After mating, the male moth dies. The female lays eggs in the bag. The female dies in the bag, mummified around the egg mass that overwinters until the following June. That's why hand picking on small plants is so successful, (if it is not a daunting task) you can eliminate all those eggs that might overwinter on your evergreen trees.

Two years ago I had a client that reported hand picking a bucket full in the spring, set the bucket in his pickup to take to a burn barrel, and he forgot about it for a couple days. With the windows closed and hot weather, the larvae hatched out prematurely inside the truck, crawling all over the place.

Once the eggs hatch, large bagworm populations can completely defoliate and kill evergreens during summer. Light infestations slow the growth of evergreens and lower their windbreak value and aesthetic appearance. Bagworms may also feed on shade and ornamental trees, fruit trees, ornamental shrubs and perennial flowers. Since deciduous plants grow new leaves each year, the defoliation caused by the feeding usually is not that much of an issue.

I was shocked to see the condition of some of the farmstead windbreaks and damage to cedar trees from Saline County to Nemaha County during the 4th of July holiday this year. This was a bad year for overwintering of this insect pest.

Remember, removing bags now and before the end of May can help reduce summer populations next year. You can easily kill them in a bucket of detergent water, by using a burn barrel or by sealing them up in a bag and sent to the landfill for proper burial! Insecticide control needs to be aimed at young larvae in mid-to-late June. If you pick them off and leave on the ground they could potentially hatch next June and crawl up the tree.

To get the best control for windbreaks or large stands of trees, late June to early July is the best time to apply insecticides for bagworm control. Feeding by mature caterpillars slows in August before pupation into adults, so chemical control in late summer and fall is not effective. Aerial applications are not effective in farmstead windbreaks, it takes hand gun applications with plenty of water and pressure.

Custom applicators in Nebraska must be licensed even if they are using a general use product for lawns, ornamentals and trees. I have heard of some stories that people have been taken advantage of and didn't get what they paid. If founded, that would be illegal of the applicator and a violation of the Nebraska Pesticide Act. Educate yourself about bagworms so your evergreen landscape plants don't decline in value.