May 23, 2008

CONTROL BAGWORMS IN JUNE

Does your cedar windbreak or spruce trees seem thin? Are some of your landscape plants beginning to look sick? Have you noticed bag-like things hanging from the branches? If so -- you have an infestation of bagworms.

Do not confuse bagworms with fall webworm that makes a large spider like webbing on wild plum trees and other landscape plants. The common bagworm is an interesting caterpillar that can protect themselves in a spindle-shaped silk bag camouflaged with bits of foliage and other debris. Completed bags range from one and one-half to two and one-half inches long. An infested cedar or spruce windbreak can have hundreds to thousands hanging from the trees. The female bags will have 200-500 eggs with larvae that hatch out in June. The larva immediately begin to feed and will start to protect themselves with a new bag. This is when they are quite vulnerable to insecticides.

The larvae may stick its head and front legs out of the top of the bag to feed and move. When disturbed, the larva immediately pulls its head into the bag and holds the opening closed. Mature larvae may stay on their host plant or drag their bags some distance before firmly attaching the bag for transformation into the adult stage in the fall.

I have seen examples of windbreaks and landscape plants in Saline County severely effected by this pest the past two years. In fact, they are a problem throughout Southeast Nebraska. They seem to prefer arborvitae and red cedar, but I have also seen them on spruce. We do not see damage as much on deciduous trees.

On Friday mornings, retired Extension Educator Larry Germer hosts the Yard and Garden Show on KUTT 99.5 radio station from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. A May program guest speaker, UNL Entomologist James Kalisch, said he felt insect activity this year is about 1 to 2 weeks behind normal because of the cool spring weather. Last year we were about 6 weeks ahead of normal so that puts us about 7 to 8 weeks behind last year.

What Larry recommends people do is to go to the trees and pick off about 20 bagworms and put them in a ziplock bag. Put the bag in the tree or by the house in the shade and check the bag on a regular basis. When you see the small worms in the bag, check trees for the newly hatched worms (white worm with a black head) and spray an insecticide at this time or a week or so later. Some of the homeowner products labeled are BT, Sevin, Malathion, Orthene and Bifenthrin. You can go to our website at www.saline.unl.edu and on the front page there is a link for bagworm information and a more comprehensive listing of products labeled.

Ten days after hatch (sometime in June this year) is the best time to spray for bagworm control because chemical can come in direct contact with larvae before they begin forming the tough, protective bag. Be sure to continue checking trees because hatches are often staggered and you may need to spray again to stop an large infestation. In the fall the males emerge as moths and fly to the female bags and mating occurs. The female never leaves her bag. She dies and the eggs
(300-500) overwinter inside the bag. Remember that sprays will not penetrate the bag, therefore, this window of time is expected to be in June this year for effective control. Of course the non-chemical means works too. Bagworm infestations on smaller trees and shrubs can be controlled by manually removing bags before the eggs begin to hatch. Destroy the bags by crushing, immersing in soapy water or burning. If bags containing larvae are simply discarded on the ground, the larvae may return to your tree or any nearby plant.

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