

News Column

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BAGWORM CONTROL

I just spent \$56.65 for a tiny bottle of Tempo to spray my windbreak. It's concentrated stuff and will cover lots of area when mixed with water, but I expect to use it all, and probably more on my 750 feet of windbreak.

Bagworms are back, and with a vengeance. I've been watching these trees for about a month, and noticed tiny bagworms about two weeks ago. Even though I had been watching closely, I didn't have to look very hard early last week to know I had a problem. While the bags weren't obvious from 10 feet away, the tree discoloration was REALLY obvious from 100 feet.

Many people think of bagworms as just unsightly, and a nuisance. That's what I used to think too. And, when there are just a few of them, that's correct. However, when bagworms are left untreated, they can kill trees.

Several years ago there was a bagworm infested windbreak I drove by nearly every day. I was tempted to stop and offer unsolicited advice, but I never did. Every July for about five years I wanted to knock on the front door and suggest spraying for bagworms before the damage got any worse. Instead, I just watched each year as the needles slowly thinned out, and the trees eventually died, one by one.

Looking back, maybe I should have stopped. It was a nice windbreak, and could have been saved. Maybe they didn't care, but they probably just didn't realize what was happening.

In this part of the state, bagworms can usually be found by mid-June. Evergreen trees are

where we generally see the biggest infestations, but they will feed on broadleaf trees and shrubs too. When I looked last week, the bags on my cedar trees were about 1/4 to 1/2 inch long.

Bagworms are easy to identify. Just look for tiny bags attached to tree branches by webbing. The bags are shaped somewhat like a beehive that you see in movies and are about 1/4 to 1 inch long, depending on when you look. They are small now and will be bigger in August if left untreated.

At this time of year bags will be green because they are made of tree needles or tree leaves, and those materials haven't yet dried up and turned brown. Bags will be brown in the fall, once the plant material they are made from has dried.

Bags are easily plucked from branches when bags are small because the worm inside the bag just attaches itself lightly so it can move around to feed on new plant tissue each day. By fall, bags will be firmly attached to branches where they will remain until spring, and beyond. In the spring, a new batch of bagworms will hatch and start the cycle anew.

If you have small bagworms, you can probably find old bags left from last year still hanging on your trees. The goal is to kill this year's bagworms before they get to the one-inch-long bag size. That needs to be done now. Around July 4 is usually the best time to spray to get the most bang for your buck.

In a home landscape where just one or two plants are affected, picking bags by hand might be a reasonable solution. In my windbreak, that's just not possible. I will need to apply an insecticide.

There are many insecticides that are effective for bagworm control. Spinosid is the active ingredient in many homeowner products and is a good choice because it works by both contact and ingestion.

Other products, including the Tempo (cyfluthrin) product I purchased, rely on contact to kill bagworms. Because contact is necessary for many products to be effective, thorough coverage is essential to good control. Just spraying a mist over the top isn't likely to achieve good results.

My project for the week is bagworm control. I'm getting after those rascals while they are small this year instead of waiting until August when they are difficult to kill. If all goes well, maybe I'll do such a good job that I can skip a year and won't have to spray at all in 2018.

I'm hoping.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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