

Emerald Ash Borers Are Here!

Emerald ash borers are exotic pests that originated from Asia that attack healthy ash trees of all species. This very destructive insect pest was first discovered in southeastern Michigan in 2002 and now has spread to over 13 states and two countries in Canada- Ontario and Quebec. The emerald ash borer adults are ½” long metallic green insect with purplish abdominal segments. Although the adult stage of this insect does little feeding damage, it is the very destructive larval stage of this insect, which looks like a creamy white tapeworm about 1 ¼” in length, that kills the trees. The larvae tunnel under the bark of ash trees and severely damage the vascular system of trees- disrupting the normal uptake of water and nutrients within them. When they exit the tree in the spring, they leave behind “D-shaped” exit holes about 1/8” wide in the bark. Early symptoms include the decline and dieback of the upper portions of the tree’s canopy proceeding then to the entire tree. Emerald ash borers can kill otherwise healthy ash trees within a few short years. Tens of millions of ash trees in other states have already been destroyed by this insect.

The emerald ash borer was first detected in Kentucky in 2009. Perhaps you saw the purple traps hanging in some of the ash trees in your neighborhood last summer that were hung to detect exactly where the insects are in KY. Eighteen Kentucky counties now have quarantines in place for the emerald ash borer, including Jefferson, Oldham, Shelby, and Trimble in the Louisville area. The traps will be put up again soon this spring. Neighboring states also have quarantines in place.

What does a quarantine mean to you? It means it is against the law to transport the emerald ash borer, ash nursery stock (trees), ash as well as all types of hardwood firewood, green ash lumber, and any other materials that present a threat of artificially spreading this insect from a quarantined area into a non-quarantined area. **To be perfectly clear, do not move hardwood firewood or logs out of a quarantined area!** There are stiff penalties and fines associated with those who break the law.

The general public can expect ash trees to begin declining very quickly here once this insect’s populations really reach peak levels. There is a lot of ongoing research being done at Michigan State University, Ohio State University, and elsewhere regarding this insect which include insecticide treatments that can be implemented. However, even though there are some chemical controls available to help prolong the life of your ash trees, it is highly recommended to begin removing your ash trees over the next few years and replacing them with other species of trees. A recommended list of ash tree replacements for our area would include maples, oaks, lindens, bald cypresses, river birches, black gums, beeches, etc.

For more information and additional recommendations for how to handle the ash borer problem, please contact a KY certified arborist or other tree professional or you can visit the national emerald ash borer website at www.emeraldashborerinfo.com. For a list of certified arborists in Kentucky, you can visit the website of the International Society of Arboriculture at www.isa-arbor.com.

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