Beetles and other Bugs Waking Up Early

Warm springlike weather in the past two months has accelerated insect infestation in our trees. According to Colorado State University entomologist David Leatherman the Sips beetle is moving around, getting ready to fly. Mike Goldblatt at Lam Tree Service confirms Leatherman's observations. He says the beetles are 3-4 weeks early and they are taking advantage of the warm weather by spraying for Isps beetle and Spruce gall. At the end of the month, they will begin spraying for Mountain Pine beetle.

Some of the early observations of trees already browning, bark falling off and early pecking activity by woodpeckers and other birds confirm that our beetle season is going to start earlier this year.

Rotarian Doug Turner, an attorney who has contributed to this column in the past, reviews for us worth while information about the Pine beetle. Since this is a major environmental concern in the mountains I thought this information would be important to bring to this column again.
From Doug:

Every 20 to 25 years, mountain pine beetle populations reach epidemic levels. The Evergreen area is in year 5 of this cycle. Without prevention efforts, the beetle can destroy thousands of trees in just one season.

The pine beetle itself does not kill a tree. Pine beetles bore into a pine tree and lay eggs. Many of the boring beetles are contaminated with bluestain fungi. The fungi infects the tree disrupting the tree's ability to carry water from its roots to its branches, and the tree dies. Beetles hatching in the infected trees fly off in July and August to repeat the annual process over again next year.

You can help prevent the destruction of our trees by knowing the telltale signs of beetle infestation and what to do with those trees once the infestation is confirmed. You can also help prevent beetle infestation by keeping your trees healthy.

The most obvious sign of beetle infestation is pitch tubes. Pitch tubes look like wads of chewing gum on the bark of the pine tree. Other signs of beetle infestation are boring dust on the bark or at the base of the tree, blue stained wood, and yellow or red pine needles.

A pitch tube is a battlefield. When the pine beetle bores into the pine tree the tree fights back. The tree excretes pine sap at the borehole in an attempt to plug the hole and expel the enemy. A strong tree can usually win a battle against one or two beetles. A weak tree, however, is at risk. The beetles will attack a weak tree in mass, overcoming the tree's resistance, and sealing its fate.

An infested tree cannot be saved. An infested tree should be cut down prior to July. The tree should be cut into long logs, sprayed with Lindane and then tightly covered with clear plastic. After three months, the plastic may be removed. If you do not want to kill the beetles and larvae with Lindane, solar treatments can be used to accomplish the job. Contact an experienced arborist or forester for more details on solar treatment.

Properly destroying infested trees is only part of the prevention plan. Just like people, strong, healthy trees are better able to resist infections. Trees under stress from improper spacing, lack of water, lack of nutrients and infected by other diseases are prime targets for the pine beetle. By keeping the trees in your yard healthy, you reduce the risk of pine beetle attacks.

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