

Get Ready for Bagworm Season

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

The bagworm season is about to get active, but don't be in a hurry to get a jump on spraying. We're still about three weeks away from the first recommended treatment date. But you need to take the time between now and then to evaluate the potential bagworm situation in your yard. If you had bagworms last year, even if you sprayed, you are at a heightened risk of having bagworms again this year. If your neighbors had bagworms last year and didn't spray or sprayed late, you can elevate that risk another level!

Right now there are no bagworms active. They still exist only as eggs in the little bags that the females resided in. Based on current accumulated heat units and looking at the forecast, we probably won't see eggs starting to hatch for another seven to ten days. Once they do start to hatch they will hatch out over a couple of week period. Sprays applied prior to eggs hatching are of no value.

As long as there is food available the young bagworms will stay on the plant that the eggs were laid on. The tiny bag is formed shortly after they start feeding, but of course it is tiny, starting at less than 1/4 inch in length. While the bagworms themselves are easily overlooked at that time, their feeding damage can cause a very noticeable change in the appearance of the host plant, especially junipers.

Neither the female bagworm in the late summer, nor the bagworm larvae have the ability to travel great distances on their own. If there is not sufficient food on the host plant early in the season the young bagworms will crawl to the top of the plant and parachute off like small spiders using their silk to catch the wind and carry them sometime hundreds of yards. If the bagworms are half grown or larger they may also crawl up to one hundred feet to get to a new host plant.

If you find tiny little bagworms then you definitely need to spray. If you can't see any but you or your neighbor had bagworms last year you probably need to spray. Remember, a female bagworm's bag can contain 300 to 1,000 eggs. So just one bag missed with a spraying treatment can cause a significant infestation. I find that planning to treat twice during June works very well. Treat around June 10th and again around June 25th to make sure you didn't miss any late hatching bagworms or any that were missed by the first treatment.

What insecticide you use is not nearly as important as how you apply it. A two or three gallon pump up sprayer will not do the job. You need to use a hose end sprayer that will apply a thorough soaking spray to the point that it is dripping off the plant. Virtually any home lawn and garden insecticide will control bagworms. Many do come as a hose end unit that you attach to the garden hose and spray eliminating the need to premix sprays. If you are spraying larger bagworms OR you want an organic alternative, use a product that contains spinosad. Spinosad is a naturally occurring bacteria that is very effective against even large bagworms and safer for beneficial insects. You still have to apply a thorough soaking spray with spinosad.

I can not over emphasize how important it is to treat bagworms in June. If you wait until late July or August most of their feeding damage is done and they will be far more difficult to control. I do not feel that the winter weather killed many or any of the bagworm eggs. Last year was very bad for bagworms and this year likely will be also. For more information and photos of bagworms go to <http://gardeningwithchuck.com/> and click on the bagworm link. If you have additional questions on bagworms call me at the Geary County Extension Office, 785-238-4161 or email at cotte@ksu.edu.