

The Garden Corner

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Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

It's not a question of "if"; it's a question of "when". The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) has been identified within our state; however, as recently as August 16th, 2016, none have been detected in Johnson County. According to the Department of Agriculture at the University of Missouri, the likelihood of this invasive pest spreading throughout the state is "high". Well? What is it? Where did it come from? What makes it an invasive pest? And, most importantly, what can I do to combat it?

As the name implies, it is a beetle with a bright green metallic color. Most authorities believe it was transported in shipping containers arriving from Asia. All of our native ash trees are susceptible to their deadly damage. Usually, the beetle colonizes the upper one third of the tree which leads to almost total dieback – this is a sure sign your area has been infected. Should you discover this type of damage, you are asked to contact the EAB Hotline at: 866-716-9974. Once the eggs hatch and burrow into the tree, they survive by living off the fluids the tree uses to survive. Within two to three years, the tree dies.

What can we do to protect ourselves and our trees from this pesky critter? First, don't buy firewood and don't transport firewood in and out of the county. The regulations regarding commercial ash lumber are fairly stringent so I'm going to say that you would be alright using ash building materials for your home projects. Just be certain the lumber sold to you has been inspected and meets the regulation requirements. "I don't have any building projects, what about my trees?"

Most of the folks who have been working with this beetle recommend beginning a tree replacement program. Like I said, it's not if; it's when. To protect yourself, your trees, and your property investment you really only have two options: (1) cut down the ash trees you do have and replace them with another type of tree; e.g. oak or maple are examples. If the ash trees you do have are healthy, you can intersperse the replacement trees now. Option number (2) is contact and hire a professional to treat your tree(s) systemically with an insecticide. Again, the experts are advising that option 2 should only be used on high value trees – in other words the one(s) you absolutely don't want to live without. Why? While the treatment is initially effective, the recurring drilling and chemical wounds will eventually compromise the trees health and you'll lose it anyway. From what I've been able to find out, the bottom line is: If we have ash trees we are going to lose them no matter what we do. Sorry to be the messenger of bad news! For your questions/comments/suggestions write: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: maandpak@embargo.com and I'll get right back with you. Hang in there! Spring isn't far off.