

## **LOOK FOR BAGWORMS NOW**

Most calls on how to control bagworms come in late July to early August when damage appears. Bagworms are difficult to control when they are that large. They are much easier to kill while small. Bagworms overwinter as eggs inside the dead female's bag. Young larvae normally hatch and emerge during mid to late May in Kansas. Now would be a good time to use control measures if you haven't already sprayed. However, make sure the bagworms are present by looking for a miniature version of the mature bagworm. Also, check to be sure the bagworms are alive before spraying. Predators and parasites can sometimes naturally control this pest.

Insecticides commonly used for controlling bagworms include acephate (Orthene), permethrin (numerous trade names), cyfluthrin (Bayer Vegetable and Garden Insect spray), bifenthrin (Bug Blaster II, Bug-B-Gon Max Lawn and Garden Insect Killer), lambda-cyhalothrin (Spectracide Triazicide, Bonide Caterpillar Killer) and spinosad (Conserve; Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray; and Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew). Spinosad is an organic control that is very effective on this pest. Thorough spray coverage of foliage is essential for good control with any of these products.

## ***Blister Beetles***

These beetles are notorious for quickly stripping vegetables (especially tomatoes) and ornamentals of their foliage. There are several species of blister beetles which vary in size (often between 0.5-0.75 inch long) and color (such as black, gray or brown-striped), but most are recognized by their elongated, narrow, cylindrical, soft bodies with middle body part (thorax) narrower than the head or wingcovers. Some home gardeners like to use hand picking as a nonchemical method for controlling these large insects. However, wear gloves and use caution because these beetles contain a substance called cantharidin. This chemical is an irritant capable of blistering internal and external body tissues exposed to the chemical. On tender human skin, body fluids of adult blister beetles may cause large, erect, watery blisters. Chemical control of blister beetles is also possible. Cyfluthrin (Bayer Vegetable and Garden Insect Spray) and gamma- or lambda-cyhalothrin (Spectracide Triazicide, Bonide Beetle Killer, Bonide Caterpillar Killer) can be used for control. Cyfluthrin has a 0 day waiting period and lambda-cyhalothrin has a 5-day waiting period on tomatoes.

## ***Watering May be Needed This Summer***

Many areas of Kansas went through an extremely wet spring. Gardeners may assume that little watering may be needed this summer as the soils were completely recharged. However, many will likely need to do more watering than they expect. Rain saturated soils can damage root systems. Excess water drives oxygen out of the soil as pore spaces are filled with water. Every living cell in a plant must have oxygen to live. If there is no oxygen, roots will die. Therefore, many of our plants may need to be babied through the summer. Newly planted trees are especially vulnerable as they have not established the extensive root system needed to absorb enough water during hot, dry, windy summers. Even trees two or three years old should receive special care even if the root system was not damaged by saturated soils. Deep, infrequent watering and mulching can help trees become established. Newly transplanted trees need at least 10 gallons of water per week, and on sandy soils they will need that much applied twice a week. The secret is getting that water to soak deeply into the soil, so it evaporates more slowly and is available to the tree's roots longer. One way to do this is to drill a small hole (1/8") in the side and near the bottom of a 5-gallon bucket and fill it with water. Let the water dribble out slowly next to the tree. Refill the bucket once, and you have applied 10 gallons. Very large transplanted trees and trees that were transplanted two to three years ago will require more water. A perforated soaker hose is a great way to water larger trees, a newly established bed or a foundation planting. See the accompanying article for an inexpensive way to water trees. In sunbaked soil, you may need to rough up the surface with a hoe or tiller to get water to infiltrate easily. It may be helpful to set the kitchen oven timer, so you remember to move the hose or shut off the faucet. If you are seeing surface runoff, reduce the flow. Regardless of method used, soil

should be wet at least 12 inches deep. Use a metal rod, wooden dowel, electric fence post or something similar to check depth. Dry soil is much harder to push through than wet. Record the time that was required to reach 12 inches and then use a time clock for any future waterings.

### ***Squirrel Damage to Trees***

Tree squirrels can cause a couple types of tree damage. Most commonly they clip the tips of branches. The length of severed branches is often 2 to 3 feet though they can be longer or shorter. When squirrels snip off a branch, they cut it at about a 45-degree angle and the cut is rather tattered. This is a nuisance type of damage and normally does not hurt the health of the tree.

More serious damage is caused when squirrels strip the bark off of limbs or rarely, the trunk. Wounds can be quite large and the squirrel can effectively girdle the branch by removing all the bark completely around the circumference. Branches girdled in this way will die and the tree may be ruined if those branches are major. Why squirrels do this is still a bit of a mystery. Some people think it is simply a means to sharpen their teeth or that they are seeking nesting material or water. Other people think that there are certain squirrels that are high-strung and cause this damage out of nervous energy. If the damage is limited to snipping the ends off of branches, it is probably best to ignore the activity as the tree suffers little harm. But if real damage is occurring due to extensive bark removal, try feeding and watering them. If that doesn't work, control may be necessary. Fox and gray squirrels are game animals and can be hunted in season where it is legal and safe to do so. They can also be trapped and moved away from the area they are causing damage.